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SPLIT-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE
PERSISTENCE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES AMONG THE AKAN METHODISTS OF GHANA

A Dissertation Presented to
the Faculty of the E. Stanley Jones School of
World Mission and Evangelism
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Missiology

by
Mathias Kwesi Forson

May 1993

Dissertation Approval Sheet

This dissertation entitled

SPLIT-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE
PERSISTENCE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
AMONG THE AKAN METHODISTS OF GHANA

Written by

MATHIAS KWESI FORSON

and submitted in partial fulfilment to the

requirement for the degree of

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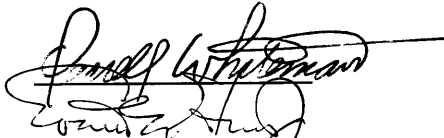
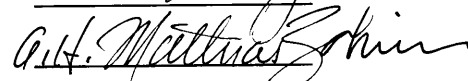
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members of the Faculty of

E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism

Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

Date

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ABSTRACT

Forson, Mathias Kwesi

1993 Split-level Christianity in Africa: A Study of the
Persistence of Traditional Religious Beliefs and
Practices Among the Akan Methodists of Ghana.

Much has been written on the phenomenal growth of the church in Africa but little has been said about the life and thought of the people who have joined the church as a result of the impact of Christian mission in Africa. Christianity appears to have failed to become fully integrated into the daily lives of the people as evident in the lively persistence of the old traditional religious beliefs and practices from which the people are supposed to have been converted. This has led to what we call *split-level Christianity*.

This study is an investigation of the causes of what appears to be the divided loyalties of large numbers of Akans who constitute the membership of the Methodist Church. The investigation necessitated a multi-dimensional approach:

1. An anthropological approach to uncover the cultural dynamics which favored or hindered the religious changes among the Akans.
2. Historical methods used to investigate how Christianity was introduced to the Akans, and
3. Observation of contemporary practices of the church under national leadership.

The research also gathered data through participant observation and interviews of church members and pastors to determine their attitude to Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices. This total data base provided the basis for analyzing why the problem of split-level Christianity exists and for making suggestions for a relevant Christianity among the Akans.

The study concludes by proposing some interventionist strategies of dealing with the problem of split-level Christianity. These include; communicating the gospel within the Akan context, providing Christian substitutes for those beliefs and practices which the Akans constantly revert to and a renewal of the existing liturgy and worship practice of the church to make it relevant to the Akan cultural context.

The study has missiological implications for other churches in Africa and other parts of the world. The specific limitation of this work to an ethnic group—the Akans of Ghana—instead of a wider cultural ambient, is meant to serve as a model for any similar study among other ethnic groups in any other cultural area of the world.

Mentor: Dr. Darrell Whiteman

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SECTION I

PRE-CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1

Persistence of Akan Religious Beliefs and Practices

In the Face of Cultural Changes

Statistical reports on global church growth show tremendous church growth in many Third World areas. The center of gravity of the Christian faith is said to have shifted to the southern continents (cf. Walbert Bühlmann 1978). In the twentieth century Christianity appears to have experienced more gains in Africa south of the Sahara than in any other place in the world. Such growth makes headlines: "In Africa, 16,400 People Became Christians Today" (*Christianity Today* Oct. 7, 1983 p. 74).

David Barrett, the pre-eminent researcher of global church trends, has predicted that by A.D.2000 there will be more than 393 million adherents to Christianity in the 59 countries of Africa (1982:782). It is instructive to note that Barrett is not the first to make such a prediction of success for Christianity in Africa. Back in 1956, Roland Oliver indicated the geometrical progression of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1912, and conjectured: "If things were to go at the same rate, there would be no pagans left in Africa after the year 1992" (Tienou 1985:142).

All this is an indication that Christianity has gained massive ground in Africa, particularly the Sub-Saharan area. While we rejoice and praise the Lord for such tremendous growth of the church in Africa, there are questions that nevertheless should be raised. What does such rapid growth of the

church or demographic increase mean? Are people merely joining the church or are they experiencing genuine Christian conversion? Is African traditional religion dying a natural death? How far has the African assimilated the Christian faith? It is these and similar questions that have triggered this research.

Church growth statistics in Africa do not give the true picture of the situation of Christianity in Africa and must be applied with caution. They might even create the impression that missionary work in Africa is all over. But this is not the case and so it is important that we have a thorough understanding of the full picture of Christianity in Africa.

Any one who lives among Africans for any length of time will come to grips with the continuing vitality of indigenous African religions in the face of the impact of Christianity and Islam. Christianity has experienced some massive growth in Africa due to intensive missionary activities and several years of evangelizing. But despite the reported church growth in Africa traditional religion has remained tenacious. This is the darker side of the story of the church in Africa which is often neglected or not reported in church growth surveys.

We know a great deal about the **breadth** of Christianity in Africa but not about its **depth**. In many respects the inner life of those who are being converted to the church is virtually unexplored terrain in terms of empirical studies. A penetrating exploration into the religious life of Africans is

necessary if we are to understand what is going on as far as the growth of the church in Africa is concerned.

The response of Africans to Christianity through the modern missionary movement from the Western churches constitutes one of the most spectacular success stories in the history of the expansion of Christianity through the twentieth century. Christianity has spread rapidly in many African societies. The church in Ghana like many others in Africa has experienced a steady growth over the years. One observes that many churches and cathedrals are filled to capacity during Sunday worship services, and on occasions such as burial and memorial services, and at Easter and Christmas.

Ghana has a population of 15 million. Of this number 8.5 million (60 percent) profess to be Christians (this figure includes members from all Christian denominations in the country). The Muslim population is 2.2 million (16 percent) and 3.5 million (22 percent) adhere to the traditional religion.¹

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be investigated is why traditional beliefs and practices persist among many Akan members of the Methodist Church in Ghana. It focuses upon what appears to be the divided loyalties of many members of the church. The problem statement led us to formulate two hypotheses:

1. The problem exists because the gospel has not been presented in forms that fit Akan culture.

2. The traditional religion still has influence because Christianity has not become adequately integrated into the daily lives of the people.

Introduction to the Problem

A critical issue that any student of religion in Africa cannot fail to observe is the persistence of traditional beliefs and accompanying practices in the face of religio-cultural changes that have occurred on the continent. The old traditional religion still has such an impact on many who have been baptized and received as members of the church. Traditional beliefs and practices persist, especially during crisis moments and events associated with the life cycle. It is a problem of the religious life and thought of many members of the church. In a sense one can say that many of them have two religions. Christianity appears to have failed to become fully integrated within the daily lives of the people.

The persistence of traditional practices among some Christians has been a problem for the church in Ghana and the Methodist Church is no exception. It has resulted in what I consider to be *split-level Christianity*, that is the co-existence within the same person of both traditional and Christian beliefs often leading to a conflict either consciously or unconsciously within the individual. It has been a source of worry among pastors of the church. Some pastors have often accused members who indulge in these practices as lacking faith in Christ.

It could be said that the problem of split-level Christianity or the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices is not only a problem for the church in Africa. The problem exists in another form in the Western church where secularism exerts much influence on some church members. Thus, is not uncommon to see Christians turning to secular counsellors or horoscopes for help. Again the church in North America today faces the emergence of religious philosophies. It will be appropriate to refer to these religious movements as "neo-paganism" since some of their basic teachings contain some elements of traditional folk religions. A typical example is the New Age Movement.

This research will seek to demonstrate; (1) that Akan traditional religion has persisted; (2) that the causes of this persistence can be identified; and (3) that the persistence can be effectively dealt with.

The lively persistence of traditional beliefs and practices is an indication that after more than a century and a half of Christianity and Western culture the grip of traditional religious beliefs and practices upon the minds and hearts of many Akan members of the church has not been loosened. The impressive numbers read in available statistics such as in Barrett's (1982) *World Christian Encyclopedia* may lead one to conclude that Africa has experienced a conversion explosion. But it appears that Christianity in African societies such as the Akan is like a lake which is many feet wide and only a few inches deep.

In other words, Christian faith seems not to have penetrated deeply into the lives of many church members. Many Akans have embraced Christianity, but they have not really turned their back on the religion of their ancestors from which they presumably have been converted. What Bascom observed about Africans' acceptance of Christianity generations ago is still true about many Christians in Ghana today. He notes:

There was often more success in gaining worshippers than in getting them to abandon the old beliefs and rituals. Many Africans were willing to try the white man's religion who were not yet willing to cut themselves off from the religion of their forefathers, or wanted to be safe and play it both ways. Many of the older Africans still feel this way, attending church on Sunday but also participating in rituals for the gods or ancestors, making sacrifices, and consulting diviners and medicine men. (1953:493)

Cases abound of traditional and Christian religious beliefs and practices co-existing in many Christians. Many church members, when faced with a crisis in the family, such as poor health, economic problems, or child birth readily resort to the *nunsinyi* (traditional priest healer).

Many Akan Christians are often caught between two worlds - the culture and religion of traditional life, and the new life in Christ as a child of the Kingdom of God. As Turnbull has rightly observed:

In all the various situations in which the African has to choose between the old and the new he is in a dilemma, because he can accept neither with his whole heart and being. Where he is forced into the new, with no choice, he is still in a dilemma because of the difficulty of reconciling one way of life with a different way of thought. (1962:203)

A greater number of the people in the church are therefore limping between two religious opinions-that of Christianity and the traditional religion. They appear to live two contradicting lives - one as Christians on Sunday mornings, and the other as ardent practitioners of their traditional religion during the rest of the week. While some indulge in traditional practices under cover of darkness, others indulge in them openly and are not disturbed about the apparent contradictions between some of those practices and their Christian beliefs.

Given that conversion to Christianity involves a religious change which involves a re-orientation of one's life, are we therefore right to say that missionary Christianity has failed to engage the mind, move the emotion, and challenge the will so that conversion to Christianity is total? I believe this is what Christianization was intended to achieve, but evidence points to the contrary. Many Akan Christians have outwardly adopted the Christian religion while inwardly their basic cosmology has remained unchanged. In anthropological terms, the persistence of a traditional cosmology is descriptive of a religious change which occurred on the surface, but failed to make a corresponding appeal on the deep level of culture.

It is easy to think that traditional beliefs and practices persist only among the rural and illiterate masses. But on the contrary, many intellectuals or those who have received Western education are also caught up in it too. An incident at one of the country's universities in 1970 provides supporting

evidence. It was discovered that every year a student died in one of the resident halls (Mensah Sarbah Hall). This caused some anxiety among the students. Realizing that the deaths were very unusual, the students sought to find out the cause as they would do in traditional society. After various investigations it was learned that the site on which the residence hall was built had been a fetish grove or shrine. To avert future deaths the students called in a fetish priest to perform a purificatory ritual. As part of the ritual, the students were required to slaughter a cow as a sacrifice. The blood was then sprinkled around the hall which included a chapel building. The implication of this story is clear—if among such highly educated folks this could happen then what would be the attitude of the rural folk in situations like this?

Aims of This Study

I propose in this study to discover those factors which may help to explain why many Akan members of the church resort to these traditional religious beliefs and practices. This will be done with a view toward exploring ways and means of developing an indigenous church and a ministry strategy that will bring vitality and vigor to the church and make it culturally relevant and challenging to the Akan people.

We want to find out for example why people resort to traditional healers in spite of the existence of modern medicine. We want to know what functions traditional beliefs and practices play in the Akan society, and to what

extent the church has been responsive to the felt needs of the people. All this requires an honest attempt to understand the nature and essence of Akan traditional religion and what the Akan seeks for in religion. This provides us with a key to understanding their religious behavior and their conversion to the Christian faith. It also becomes the basis for understanding mission among the Akans and other African peoples and for developing an indigenous church that meets their religious aspirations.

Since my own impressions will certainly be involved in evaluating these issues, it will be appropriate at this juncture to state my own position on this matter so that the reader might know from where I am coming. I am a Methodist pastor committed to the full authority of the Scriptures. I hold to the Wesleyan evangelical tradition. I am also seeking to understand the cultural and religious pluralistic world in which we live and how to make Christ known within it, particularly in the Akan context.

Many well meaning, but culturally insensitive, missionaries and some African church leaders have adopted an attitude of denial of the validity of the Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps some of the reasons for such an attitude are that they fail to satisfy any canons of scientific evidence and proof, or that these beliefs are perceived to be incompatible with the Scriptures and Christian faith. The tendency therefore has been to regard them as superstitions. For example, the Christian Council of Ghana in 1948

published a pamphlet on witchcraft and took a position that witchcraft was not a reality, but only a psychological delusion (Debrunner 1959:131-132).

My missiological training and personal experience has helped me to critique some of the earlier approaches to the issue. I am convinced that such denials of the reality of the African's religious experience, beliefs, and practices and the ecclesiastical denunciations of them have often been based on a Western rationalistic approach and do not solve the problem. It is not a wise approach to deny some of these beliefs when the Bible affirms the existence of some of the elements in Akan traditional beliefs, such as belief in other spiritual powers or principalities and powers?² It is important to note how Jesus himself confronted some of these issues in his ministry.

It is my candid opinion that if we continue to operate under the assumption that all aspects of indigenous African religion are pagan, worthless, superstitious, or evil, then the problem will continue to persist. It would be erroneous to subject these traditional beliefs to scientific analysis or evaluate them by a Western worldview and conclude that they are invalid or that the African has no concept of causality. It appears that for many Western thinkers, the sphere of the supernatural is often narrowed, hence they tend to regard many African beliefs as superstitious. If the gospel message is to become culturally relevant for the Akans, some of these beliefs need to be addressed and not dismissed outright. Of course that requires some discernment with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I do not deny the validity of the germ theory or the scientific explanation of diseases; neither do I affirm every traditional belief and practice. It could also be said that Akans have often overemphasized the supernatural causes of events when a natural explanation is obvious. Akan religious specialists and some prophets of the African Independent Churches have capitalized upon the fears of the people concerning evil spirits and have identified every problem as caused by demonic activities. Family members, particularly the old women, are often accused of having caused sickness, death, or misfortune through their witchcraft. Such accusations have at times resulted in rifts between family members when one of them is accused.

Background to the Problem

The Akan traditional religion has been in existence for hundreds of years before Christianity was introduced. Many Akans have relied on these traditional beliefs and practices as a means of dealing with some of the problems that confront them. With the advent of Christianity the Akans were persuaded to give up these beliefs and practices because they were regarded as primitive and superstitious. But in the face of both church injunctions against these beliefs and practices, and the secularizing impact of Western culture, many of these beliefs and practices have continued, albeit clandestinely.

My own background as an Akan and my position as a pastor who has had direct experience with the people has given me an opportunity to become

familiar with the problem. The problems my church members brought to me for discussion and possible solutions often had to do with difficult choices arising from cultural obligations from which they could not escape. In one instance, all the members of a town where I was a minister were asked by the chief and elders of the town to make financial contributions toward the purchase of a cow to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to remove *mbusu* or evil that was threatening the community. Many of the members of the church felt obliged to make that contribution.

The phenomenon of split-level Christianity represents a problem the church has lived with for a long time. In 1955 the Christian Council of Ghana (the Gold Coast) organized a symposium under the theme "Christianity and African Culture" in an attempt to address this problem (Christian Council of Ghana 1955). Many interesting papers were presented, but many of the insights from that conference seem to have been forgotten and belong now only to the recesses of history. The church did not make any effective follow-up of some of the recommendations of this conference. Split-level Christianity is therefore an old problem crying for solution.

As one carefully observes the everyday lives of the Akans, it becomes more evident that Christianity and African culture appear as separate spheres of experience in the lives of many Akan Christians. While the majority of Christians have accepted Christianity in its outward forms, their inward spirit is still ruled by the attitudes and outlooks of the traditional culture. There are

several areas of resistance to which African traditional religious beliefs and worldview are holding tenaciously against the impact of Euro-American ideas. A communique issued by the Faith and Order Consultation of The World Council of Churches meeting in Accra, July-August 1974 acknowledged that "For all Africans, even after many years of Christianity, and standing fully within the Christian Revelation, the spirituality and the world view of their fathers is still very present" (World Council of Churches 1974:4).

The problem is not peculiar to the Akans, but is also present in most African societies and indeed many areas where indigenous religion existed before Christianity was introduced. These ancient faiths have not disappeared in spite of vast numbers of conversions from their ranks to Christianity and other religions. The Akans of Ghana provide an interesting case study of a typical African phenomenon.

The Impact of Nationalism and Colonialism

The problem has been compounded by the fact that we live in an age of religious and cultural pluralism in which people have become much more aware of their religion and culture than before, especially in countries that were formerly under colonialism. With the rise of new nation states, many of these countries, including Ghana, which went through a certain amount of deculturization during the colonial era, have felt the need to establish their

cultural identities in contrast with the denigration or rejection of it which often marked the colonial era.

Since Ghana obtained independence from Britain in 1957 there has been a tendency to reassert its cultural identity, through reactivation of some of its traditional religious and cultural practices. On the eve of independence day on March 6, 1957, the name of the country was changed from Gold Coast to Ghana.³ Ghana was an ancient medieval empire in the northern savannah area of West Africa. It is believed that migration connected the present Republic and ancient Ghana. Though the evidence of a historical tie with this ancient empire is not certain, the renaming of country was to assert that the glories of the African past had reappeared in the new dawn of nationalist independence. Again taking a name from history signals a conscious return to roots and a kind of cultural revival. A present effort to reinforce this position is the cultural enrichment program which has been introduced as part of the school curriculum.

The rise of national awakening had some negative impact on Christianity. Christianity was often identified too uncritically with Western culture with some of the nationalists calling for a return to the traditional culture. As Andrew Walls (1987:263) rightly observes "a new pride in traditional culture, including its religious aspects, has appeared even among people who were not fully nurtured in it." For example, the concept of "African personality" began to be actively promoted by the new African

leaders with Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana championing such causes.⁴

In Ghana, some have proposed a slogan known as *sankofa* which literally implies a return to original roots. The call is to the people to look back to see in their past the essence of the values and goals that they want to realize today and tomorrow. Reference to the past always includes the traditional religion. In the process of "looking back" some people have concluded that the church is an alien institution or, in some extreme cases, that it is an agent of colonialism. Fortunately some of these nationalist leaders having been educated in the mission schools "thought too well of their Christian affiliation to want to destroy Christianity" (Dickson 1991:126).

Christianity and Akan Culture

Because the Akan religion forms part and parcel of the daily lives of the people, many Akan Christians are very often confronted with making difficult choices between their faith as Christians and their cultural obligations as Akans. This is particularly the case when they have to deal with death, the family, or any of the events associated with the life cycle.

The "faithful ones" who have refused to participate in traditional practices have sometimes suffered a kind of alienation from their own people. Christianity, and for that matter the church, is often criticized for having promoted cultural and religious alienation. Some people see the church as

intrinsic to colonialism and imperialism from whose shackles the African needs to be liberated. This position is reinforced by the accidental yet historical fact that some of the missionaries arrived in the same vessel, worked contemporaneously, and even co-operated with the colonizers.

A variety of Christians and non Christian Africans have responded to the question of the impact of Christianity and Western culture on African traditional religion (cf. Bediako 1992). Critics like Ali Mazrui defend the traditional religion and say that "the ancestors of Africa are angry" and have pronounced the curse of cultural sabotage" (1986:11). He therefore calls for the rejection of foreign influence called westernization and believes that the "ancestral is authentic" (1986:211, 295).

In the same vein some perceive the African religion as having much in common with Judeo-Christian religion and conclude that it is as authentic and redemptive as Christianity. They would therefore defend the African religion as a viable option to both Christianity and Islam or any of the world religions.

A typical example of such calls to return to traditional origins comes from a former Ghanaian Catholic priest, Dr. Kwabena Damoah, who called himself "Okomfo" (the name for a traditional priest). Damoah broke with the Catholic Church and emerged as a proponent of the "Afrikania Mission" with a view to promoting the African traditional religion. According to Damoah (n.d:2) the Afikania mission aims to take "the best of the past, present and future, to create a new synthesis to guide man in his quest for God and total

human development." His main thrust is that the original African manner of worshipping God is better for Africans than the Christian way which he perceives as foreign and uncongenial.

These movements outside the church, with their implied or stated rejection of Christianity constitute only one aspect of the reaction against Westernization and missionary Christianity. Within the church itself, several African Christian Scholars including Pobee (1980), Dickson (1984), and Mbiti (1986) have called for African theology which takes into consideration the religio-cultural background of the people.

It is time for the church to think its way through this problem and proclaim its faith as God's word to Africa. This should go beyond merely proposing African theology. Theology must be brought within the life experience of the people. As Busia has argued:

The people's interpretation of the universe must be appreciated if Christianity, or any faith based on the universality of moral values, is to become meaningful within their culture. I submit further that until Christianity has come to grips with this problem, not only in Africa, but in other non European countries, Christianity will remain an alien and superficial addition to more hospitable creeds. (1955:6)

The truth in Busia's statement has been in some respects recognized by Kraft and other missionary anthropologists. Reflecting on his missionary experience in Nigeria, Kraft (1979:6) honestly admits that he was faced with such questions as belief in the reality of evil spirits, the problem of polygamy and other issues for which his training had not equipped him to deal with.

According to Kraft the issue has to do with the question of how a people's understanding of their own religion and cultural heritage differs from a scientific description of it, or the understanding of it from other religious perspectives.

My own observation of this problem as an Akan, and my pastoral work among the Akans for more than 12 years, has convinced me that this is a problem which requires serious attention by the church. As a matter of fact my research was triggered by this very fact.

Significance of the Study

Contemporary studies on the church in Africa have tended to focus on African Theology (cf. Dickson 1984, Mbiti 1986) the African Independent Churches (cf. Baeta 1962, Turner 1975), and African Traditional Religion (Idowu 1962, Parrinder 1976, Mbiti 1977). A review of the literature reveals that a lacuna exists with regard to research on the inner life or the religious life and thought of the Africans who are being converted to the church. I believe this study will help fill this gap. The problem of spilt-level Christianity, and how to help the Africans deal with it, is virtually unexplored terrain in terms of empirical studies.

This study focuses on this neglected aspect of the mission of the church in Ghana. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide some useful information that will help the church and other change agencies in their

ministry to the Akans. Again it is hoped that this research will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of split-level Christianity which exists in many traditional societies where Christianity has been introduced.

While specific findings of the study relate largely to the Methodist Church in Ghana, they may be of help to the church in other parts of the world seeking to develop a culturally relevant ministry. It is also hoped that the findings of the study will help the church and other mission agencies re-evaluate their existing methods of evangelism and communication of the gospel. Although the questions pursued are of interest to the field of missiology, the study may be of assistance to other agents of change in understanding the dynamics of innovation.

Methodology and Data Base for the Study

The following data were used to test the hypotheses:

1. Historical information about early Methodist missionary contact recorded in the form of journals, diaries, and letters by missionaries who have worked in Ghana.
2. Conference and Synod reports of the church.
3. Ethnographic Information collected during fieldwork in Ghana in 1992 about Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Fortunately Akan society has received much attention by social scientists who have conducted anthropological and sociological studies. This provided

me with a mine of information about the Akan traditional religion and culture with which to check my data collected in the field. The authoritative works of Rattray (1927), Forde (1954), Busia (1951), and Christensen (1954) were consulted. My own background as an Akan and acquaintance with Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices were also useful assets.

I had the opportunity to do field work among the Akans from March to June 1992 for the purpose of obtaining primary information on the attitudes of church members toward traditional beliefs and practices. Data for my research was obtained through personal interviews and participant observation where possible. There were some within the population who could not read and write so this method was chosen to get a better response rate than I would have with a questionnaire. It must also be appreciated that a study such as this which relies solely on written responses cannot address itself to the problem in its entirety.

The only problem I encountered was that it was sometimes very hard for some people to explain why they do certain things. "It is our custom" is sometimes the explanation people would give for certain actions. For some, certain practices have become part and parcel of their daily lives so that they practice them either consciously or unconsciously. To overcome this problem I interviewed some elders of the community who knew more about the customs and traditions of the Akan people. Nevertheless, this research approach was helpful in obtaining the kind of information needed for this study.

The archives of the Methodist Church in Ghana provided a helpful source of information. Fortunately most of the records that were not formerly available in Ghana have now been made available on microfiche.

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule is found in Appendix 1. Questions were framed within the contours of the general objectives of the study. The questions were designed to elicit respondents' attitudes to traditional religious beliefs and practices and to discover reasons why people continue to indulge in them. I also made extensive use of insights gained from informal interactions with ministers and members of the church as well as people outside the church.

Population and sample. The population for my study is the Akan members of the Methodist Church of Ghana. To obtain a representative sample of Akan members of the church, subjects were chosen from among the laity and the clergy of both rural and urban churches. I interviewed 60 church members and 30 pastors. The following criteria were used:

For the church members, they must be

1. an adult of 25 years or older,
2. a member of the church for at least 5 years, and
3. a member of a different congregation from other informants

The pastors, had to be

1. Ordained ministers for at least five years,
2. In full time service of the church, and
3. currently serving in a church of about 100 members

The ministers selected were interviewed on their views about the problem of split-level Christianity and asked to think through some possible solutions to the problem.

The study will demonstrate that the persistence of Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices can be effectively dealt with, for example, through a fresh way of presenting the gospel cross-culturally so that the gospel message will become meaningful to the people and the problem of split-level Christianity will be minimized. This way of presenting the gospel I would call "Indigenous Evangelism."

Definition of Key Concepts

Split-level Christianity

The term split-level Christianity refers to the co-existence within the same person of both a Christian thought and behavior systems and another system of thought which is inconsistent with the Christian one. Bulatao (1966:2) observing the same phenomena among the Filipinos has described it as follows:

The split-level person at one level professes allegiance to ideas, attitudes and ways of behaving which are mainly borrowed from the Christian

west. At another level he holds convictions which are more properly his own ways of living and believing which were handed down from his ancestors. These flow into action now and then.

It can be described as two value systems differing from each other, with one or the other of them coming to the fore under certain circumstances and receding to the background at other times. Split-level Christianity is different from syncretism which will be discussed in chapter 2.

Akans

The Akan people are principally composed of the Asante, Fante, and Twi speaking people of southern Ghana. Asante are south central, Akwapem are southeast, Fante are south central. Within this group are other sub-groupings. The dialects of the various Akan groups are mutually intelligible. Their political, economic, social, and religious structures reveal a common pattern with very little variations.

Christine Oppong (1974:36-37) has suggested a helpful grouping of the Akan people into their major cultural and geographic divisions, each typified by the best known sub-groups, viz: the coastal Akans (Mfantsefo or Fante); the Eastern Akan (Akuapem); and the Inland Akan (Asuantsefo -Ashanti or Asante). The Akans represent about 44 percent of the total 15 million people of Ghana.

The former group, Mfantsefo or Fantes, will provide the main focus for this study, and it is chosen for a number of reasons: it is the group among

whom European activities and Methodist missionary work in Ghana began; Methodist churches are very predominant among this group; again it is the group I am more conversant with being a member of the group myself and having worked as a pastor among them.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine is a medical practice which uses mostly plant medicine. According to Twumasi (1975:9) "A sine qua non of traditional medicine is that the service is performed through the utilization of magico-religious acts and concepts." Often the belief is that the malefic action of another person or intervention by a supernatural power may cause illness, which may be cured by resorting to the appropriate magico-religious formula or application to the supernatural.

Worldview

Every culture has its own worldview, which is said to be the central assumptions, concepts, and premises that are more or less widely shared by the members of a culture or subculture. Robert Redfield (1968:85) describes the worldview of a people as "the way a people characteristically looks outward upon the universe.....how everything looks to a people." Hiebert (1976:371) affirms that worldview is learned unconsciously early in life and it is not readily changed.

Crisis Times

These are times when one is faced with difficult life situations. Gerkin (1979:32) affirms that in the situation of crisis we are confronted with our human vulnerability, our finitude, the utter impossibility of our deepest hopes and wishes. In that situation says Gerkin, a most elemental choice is forced upon persons that is at its core a religious "faith" choice.

Many powerful forces, personal, cultural and situational, come together to shape the direction of human choice in times of crisis. For the Akan crisis experience will involve the crucial periods of life, during pregnancy, at birth, during tense periods of childhood when life hangs in the balance, during illness and at death, childlessness, and marital problems. In such situations many Akans would often seek help through magico-religious practices. The phrase often used is *twa wo ho* or *hwe hwe famu*.⁵ (which means there must be a spiritual cause for that).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into three main sections. Section One—chapters one, two and three—deals with pre-history background. The first chapter sets forth the problem, the objectives of the study, the methodology, and the implications. Chapter two is about religious and culture change in a traditional society. It discusses among other things the concept of primitive religion, and the function of religion in a society. Chapter three deals with the

Akan worldview and religious cosmology. Specific Akan beliefs and practices are discussed.

Section Two, chapters four and five, focuses on contemporary practice of Christianity in Ghana which reveals split-level Christianity with particular reference to the Methodist Church. Chapter four deals with the history of the early Methodist missionary work among the Akans in Ghana. Chapter five is a summary of the findings of the study. It discusses the factors accounting for the persistence of Akan beliefs and practices among church members.

Section Three, chapters six, seven, and eight deals with proposals to revitalize the church. Chapter six is a missiological appraisal of the Methodist Church, Ghana, and how it is carrying on its mission among the Akans today. It analyzes the contemporary Christian practices of the church and their inadequacy in dealing with Akan spirituality. The last two chapters deals with the conclusions and the implications of the study. It is here that I present some proposals as possible solutions to the problem and then draw together the implications of this study for mission today.

End Notes

1. These figures were released to me in an interview with Prof. Kwesi Dickson the chairman of the Christian Council of Ghana on October 30, 1991.
2. See for example Ephesians 6:12-13.
3. The name Gold Coast was given to the country by the Europeans because they found a lot of Gold in the country on their arrival.

4. The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement started by Kwame Nkrumah was a practical example to foster the African quest for selfhood. The movement was a political wing of the ruling Convention People's Party led by Kwame Nkrumah.

5. These Akan expressions are used to imply the need to consult a spiritualist for possible explanation of a phenomenon for which it is difficult to find a natural explanation. The Akan traditional view will often attribute this to a spiritual cause.

CHAPTER 2

Religious and Cultural Change In a Traditional Society

One objective of this study is to discover why certain Akan religious beliefs and practices have persisted. The study falls into the domain of cultural change; we will therefore discuss in this chapter some of the anthropological theories of cultural change which are relevant for our understanding of the problem this study seeks to address.

The anthropological study of religion has helped bring to light the religion of non-Western societies. In their study of religion three main questions have engaged the attention of anthropologists. These are questions about: (1) the origins of religion and its place in human history; (2) the nature and function of religion; (3) the meaning of religious ideas and symbols.

Early nineteenth century anthropological theories discussed the development of human origins and culture in terms of evolution. The early anthropologists like Tylor, Spencer, and Frazer postulated an evolution of religious beliefs and practices from a simpler, more uniform past to the complex heterogenous present. Evolutionary theory imagined belief to have evolved towards the great religions, with Christianity as the ultimate goal of the process.

E. B. Tylor (1871) traced the origins of religion to an earlier belief in spirits which he termed animism. He also held that magic was a form of

primitive science with the function of explaining the nature and cause of phenomena which humans experience. James G. Frazer (1890) following Tylor traced the origin of religion to magic and postulated a three-stage development of human thought from magic through religion to science. He argued that magic was based on a false association of ideas. In a sense these earlier anthropologists were concerned with cultural change because they were interested in plotting man's "progress" up the evolutionary ladder from the stage of "savagery" to "civilization" (Whiteman 1983:3).

Evolutionary theory is criticized on the ground that it is built on mere conjectures and speculations about society and human beings without empirical data to support its assumptions. Thus in the United States, Frans Boaz and his student A. L. Kroeber called for empirically based history to replace the "armchair speculation" that characterized evolutionary theories. Andrew Lang and others argued that many simple societies have a belief in an all-powerful creator, God, a belief evolutionists attributed only to advanced universalistic religions (Hiebert 1990:255)

The Concept of Primitive Religion

The term primitive was used by anthropologists and non-anthropologists to describe the cultures and peoples of non-Western societies. Until recently anthropology was identified as the study of "primitive peoples."

The relevance of this concept for our study lies in the fact that in seeking to bring about religio-cultural change in Africa missionaries and other agents based their conclusions, and the conduct they required of their converts, on such information of traditional beliefs as they possessed. These were influenced by the nineteenth century evolutionary theory and the idea of the primitive. Missionaries were certainly the products of their culture, and they could not completely disassociate themselves from the dominant thinking of their day. They saw African peoples and their religious beliefs and practices as "primitive" and "superstitious". Small wonder that the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh concluded that African traditional religions contained "no preparation for Christianity" (World Missionary Conference 1910:24).

For most of these early missionaries African religions and peoples were primitive. Africans therefore needed to be educated and civilized as part of the Christianization process. Various views were expressed about those cultures which were regarded as primitive. It was alleged for example that the primitive mentality was low and incapable of abstract thinking. Levy-Bruhl (1923) argued that the primitive mentality was pre-logical and dominated by a belief in supernatural forces which distorted rational thought processes. Alongside this theory was the strong sense of the inferiority of people with dark skin.

As Charles Taber points out:

Motivated in part by the need to find ideological justification for the harshest, most degrading version of slavery the world has ever known, both Christians and non-Christians mustered what "proof" they could find for the notion that dark pigmentation signaled inferior intelligence, inferior morality, and inferior sensibility. Christians used pseudo-exegesis to argue that the so called "curse of Ham" (Genesis 9:18-27) applied to the black races, supposedly decedents of Ham.(1991:61)

It is hard to believe that the Bible was used to justify such a position.

As we have noted earlier the beginning of the twentieth century saw a critical response to evolutionism and its premise about the inferiority of the "primitive."

It is important to note that only Third World societies were seen as primitive because they displayed the characteristic of "simple," "small scale," "tribal," and "animistic" even though some of those characteristics were present in other Western societies. Tienou (1991:298) has noted the problem with the use of the word simple because "simplicity and complexity cannot be measured objectively." He therefore rejects the use of "tribal" in terms of small scaleness on the grounds that certain "tribes" in Africa like Fulani, and Hausa are larger than some nation states in Europe.

Tienou further says that the association of "animism" with any specific religion is untenable because the origin and history of the term do not allow for that:

For E.B.Tylor, animism, the belief in spiritual beings, was supposed to be a term useful for a minimal definition of religion in general. If one takes Tylor's definition seriously, then

primitive people are those who believe in spiritual beings. Presumably, one of the characteristics of non-primitiveness is the lack belief in spiritual beings! (1991:299)¹

I would like to add as a proviso here that in matters of religion, as of art, there are no "simpler" peoples. As Victor Turner (1969:3) has put it there are "only some people with simpler technologies than our own."

It has been necessary to devote some attention to this concept of primitive religion because even though the term has been discarded, the popular misconception about "primitives" has not gone with the wind. The concept is still alive and well in the minds of some people today. We cannot therefore regard it as something of the past. In certain quarters it has been the basis for starting particular mission and development strategies. At its worst it has become the stereotypes with which people use to appeal for funds and support.

I identify with the view expressed by Tite Tienou (1991:293-295) that even though the term has been discarded by most anthropologists, its influence on mission has been, and continues to be detrimental. It is reflected in the many ways Christians have approached non-Westerners in attempting to convert them. Again, it prevents Westerners from seeing the challenge of mission at their doorsteps. Discussing the "primitive" is therefore still relevant in mission studies today because "it is often the basis on which distinctions are made between peoples, and on which strategies are developed for world evangelization" (Tienou 1991:295). The terms "developing countries," "Two-

Thirds world," used today for countries formerly regarded as "Primitive societies" is a indication that the concept is alive and well at least in the minds of some people.

Today the term primitive is used with caution, and with qualification because of the pejorative and negative connotations it carries which also contradict the anthropological principle of objectivity. Many who use it today will often qualify its usage in a value-free sense. Several alternative terms have therefore been proposed which include: non-literate, tribal, simple, small-scale, homogeneous, and animist. None of these terms appear to be wholly satisfactory terms because no matter how "value free" these term may be, they still characterize Africa as the opposite of the West and thus reinforce a negative stereotype.

Harold Turner (1975) has suggested "primal" as a more innocuous term because of the objections to the use of the terms discussed above. I would think that the religion of African peoples can simply be called **African Religion** in the same way Jewish religion is called Judaism. African religious tradition has a right to be recognized and vindicated on its own terms. The continual use of the term with qualification only goes to prove that the old ideas about the religion and cultures of African people as primitive still predominate in the minds of people.

I must not be understood to be pleading that there be no intervention with African religion. My concern is that the term "primitive" has greatly

misshaped the average person's view of the religion and culture of African peoples. With this mentality theologians, classical historians, Semitic scholars, and other students of religion have not given much thoughtful attention to the religions of these people, because it is perceived as being of little importance. The usual argument is that these cultures do not really have religions in any sense comparable to the other World religions, since they have no written scriptures.

Religion and Culture

Religion is one of the most important aspects of culture studied by anthropologists and other social scientists. Religion is found in every human society. It finds expression in material culture, in human behavior, and in value systems, morals, and ethics. Scholars from many disciplines have analyzed religion with their own methods. For example, William James (1960:10), an experimental psychologist, defined religion as: "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine".

According to Malefijt religion like culture consists of systematic patterns of beliefs, values, and behavior, acquired by man as a member of society (1968:6). Clifford Geertz however sees religion as a system of symbols. For Geertz religion is

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3)

formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (1973:90)

Geertz's definition recognizes the fact that religion is a basic element of human existence. In traditional societies like the Akan, religion is neither something to join or belong to, nor is it merely a system of intellectual reflections or convictions regarding relationship between humans and God; rather it is part and parcel of life.

Again, Geertz takes a problem solving approach to religion. As Hiebert (1990:256) has commented, Geertz holds that religion provides answers to the three fundamental human experiences that threaten to make life meaningless; the problem of bafflement when human explanation systems fail, the problem of suffering and death, and the problem of injustice or feeling of moral disorder and chaos. It answers these by appealing to higher realities outside of daily experience.

Religion can be seen as both social and cultural. Social scientists now recognize the interrelationship that exist between religion and culture. Any study of a society cannot fail to include its religious aspects. Max Assimeng (1989:69), a Ghanaian sociologist, is of the view that it is much more appropriate to speak of "religion in society" rather than "religion and society." In most African societies like the Akan one observes a complex relationship between religion and other institutional aspects of the society or culture.

Culture and Cultural Change

One major preoccupation of anthropology is the dynamics of culture. The question with which anthropologists are concerned is how cultures change. An understanding of culture and how cultures change is very relevant to our work because no society exists in a cultural vacuum. Again to understand the impact of the introduction of any new idea such as Christianity, we must take cognizance of the cultural context in which the encounter has taken place.

Definition of Culture

The term culture has resisted any generally accepted definition because of the very complex nature of society. Geertz has remarked that:

...the term culture has by now acquired a certain aura of ill repute in special anthropological circles because of the multiplicity of its referents and the studied vagueness with which it has all too often been invoked. (1973:89)

Several definitions of the term have been put forward by social scientists. It is interesting to note that Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) reviewed nearly 300 different definitions of the term. This work demands an anthropological understanding of culture.

The earliest and classic definition of the term was put forward by Edward B. Tylor considered by many to be the father of modern cultural anthropology. Tylor (1871:1) defined culture as "that complex whole which

includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Culture embraces the total man-made response to the environment of a people. It refers to the system of values, ideas, beliefs, and behaviors which a particular group have in **common**, distinguishing them from another group of people. It is the integrated, organized, and distinctive way of life that distinguishes one people from another. In a broader sense, culture includes all the ideas, mythologies, legends, folk wisdom, and common-sense knowledge a people express in articulate speech (their own language) or by means of other symbolic forms. It consists of all the learned modes of behavior that are socially transmitted from one generation to the next (Steward 1955:43-52). We notice that although people in any given society may differ in other ways, there are nevertheless certain ideas or values that they may have in common. Culture is therefore universal in the sense that every group or society has a culture and shares a way of life, no matter how simple this culture may be.

Cultural Change

A knowledge of how cultures change helps us to understand and predict responses to the innovative technologies and ideas involved in Christian mission which are designed to bring about effective change. For example the preaching of the gospel is expected to bring about a religious-cultural change in the form of conversion.

The knowledge of culture change also helps us to be sensitive and able to judge people's receptivity and attitude to change.

Culture change is one of the realities we observe about human life. All human traditions and culture keeps changing. This includes the thought, behavior, and reactions of the people, as well as their economy, politics and religious life. Culture change is a universal phenomenon. Over the last several years, significant changes have occurred not only in Africa, but in all societies. This implies that culture is not static, but dynamic. The only culture that does not experience change is a dead culture.

Changes in certain aspects of a society's culture however occurred much more rapidly and extensively than in others. Again no society ever changes without leaving traces of old cultural forms. As Assimeng (1989:68) has pointed out, such traces are much more observable in the area of the symbols and values of the society's culture, than in the material components of the culture. This might appear to be a paradox of cultural change.

If culture consists of ideas held in common as we have argued, then culture change occurs when new ideas which are introduced into the society are accepted. Changes in any cultural system are due to both internal and external factors. Internal changes are those cultural patterns that are transmitted from generation to generation. In many cases those changes are never reproduced identically from one generation to the other. Malefijt (1968:329) affirms that internal conditions affecting the rate of change include

the relative degrees of cultural receptivity to new ideas, the amount of freedom of inquiries and of competition, the degree of cultural elaboration, the population size and density, the presence of innovators, and the inventors, and perhaps most important, the degree of harmony between cultural and social values. Internal change may be very rapid and very purposeful as in the case of revitalization movements, whereby a given society consciously attempts to create a more satisfying culture. The Independent Churches of Africa are good examples of such movements.

Contact with others influences humans very profoundly and leaves an impact on one's culture. External changes are those that are the result of outside agents such as missionaries and development agencies or as a result of conquest by another society. Changes occur in a culture when other ideas foreign to that culture are being introduced, adopted or reinterpreted and shared in common by members of a particular society. External changes are in most cases intentional planned change from the outside. In all these cases, with the introduction of the new culture, the original culture is forced to change. In some cases the changes are gradual while in others it can be fast and drastic.

We must point out here that in the 1920s and 1930s a surge of American anthropological interest in culture change took the form of acculturation studies, focusing primary on American Indians.² At the same time British anthropologists focussed their attention on the changing societies

of Africa under the impact of colonialism (cf. Hunter 1936, Fortes 1936, and Malinowski 1939).

The process of innovation. According to Barnett, an innovation is "any thought, behavior, or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms" (1953:7). Something becomes an innovation when it is different in quality from a previous form. Barnett further affirms that:

Innovation does not result from the addition or subtraction of parts. It takes place only when there is a recombination of them. Psychologically this is a process of substitution, not one of addition or subtraction, although the product, the novelty, may be described as having a greater or lesser number of parts than the antecedent form. The essence of change, however, lies in the restructuring of parts so that a new pattern results. (1953:9)

From this perspective Barnett helps us to understand that changes introduced from outside by external agents are not successful until the receptors can interpret them in terms of their pre-existing ideas. Thus when a new idea like Christianity is introduced to the Akans whose background is the traditional religion, it must have the capacity of enabling the people to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the old religion. In order for a new custom or behavior to be accepted, someone must first have the idea. Such an idea may come out of a felt need or something that another person wishes to introduce. Innovation consists of recombining previous ideas in new ways.³ In Barnett's terminology, although the outsider may "advocate" a change, it is only the

receptors in a society who may "innovate" (i.e bring about changes of patterning) within that society.

Innovation is basically a socio-psychological process. Many variables are involved in stimulating and affecting culture change. One of these factors according to Barnett is the desire for change or non-desire of a person or group of persons (1953:61). The role of the advocate is also another factor, i.e how the new idea is presented also affects culture change. The advocate as an outsider must be able to convince the innovator or the insider of the need for change.

Diffusion and acculturation. In anthropological terms diffusion refers to the process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group. Several patterns of diffusion may be identified: diffusion by direct contact, in which elements of culture are first taken by neighboring societies and then gradually spread farther and farther; diffusion by intermediate contact in which third parties, frequently traders, colonialist, missionaries, carry cultural traits from one society to another; and stimulus diffusion, in which knowledge of a trait belonging to another culture stimulates the invention or development of a local equivalent.

The concept of diffusion in cultural change is very much related to our subject matter in the sense that an understanding of the process helps us to know how Akans have adopted some aspect of Western culture while

maintaining other aspects of their culture. This has resulted in what we see as split-level Christianity.

Acculturation is the process of change which occurs whenever two groups or societies are in intensive contact with one another. In contrast with diffusion, acculturation is a result of some external pressure. Frequently one society is more powerful than the other so that the weaker group is often obliged to acquire cultural elements from the dominant group. In many cases the relationships between groups is one of inequality in technological development or political strength. Acculturation is the process of extensive borrowing in the context of superordinate-subordinate relations between societies. In this process, the less powerful society in contact with the powerful society changes its culture through innovation by adopting some aspects of the culture of the other society. It will however be too naive to think that when two cultures come into contact with each other culture change occurs only among the less powerful one. Westerners who have lived in the two-thirds world have sometimes been influenced by certain aspects of their hosts' culture.

External changes are in most cases intentionally planned change from the outside. Changes that have occurred in many societies of the two-thirds world are mainly the result of cultural contact with the West. The principal agents of change have been missionaries, colonial government officials, and traders who have introduced new tools, laws, and different forms of religion.

Cultural change has resulted when the introduced new ideas have been adopted by the indigenes.

Functionalism and Cultural Change

While changes are occurring in certain aspects of the culture of various African societies, there is nevertheless a tendency towards conservation in those aspects of culture dealing with kinship, family structure, and religion. As Sarpong (1977:93) rightly points out in the case of Ghana, a deep sense of fidelity to "what our ancestors did" still persists, which makes it, for the time being, impossible to discard it altogether. Consequently even literate people submit themselves to some traditional rite at least in its simplified form.

It is interesting to observe African cultural retentions in Latin America and the Caribbean. For example in Haiti and Brazil, African cultures have survived contact with Western culture in the form of Voodoo, and Afro-Brazilian religion.⁴ Another example is magic and folk beliefs among rural African Americans. The fact is, the millions of Africans who were dragged to the New World were not blank slates on which Western civilization could be written at will. As people with complex social and religious systems of their own, these Africans did not forget their religion and culture. Today they practice it in their own unique way.⁵ It is important to note that African-Americans celebrate Black history week every year in which certain aspects of African culture are given prominence. The question is why do some elements

in a culture change and while others resist change. We turn to the theory of functionalism for some explanation of this phenomenon.

Functionalism

Before the emergence of anthropological theory of functionalism, anthropologists had not given serious attention to how various elements in a culture are related. Functionalists are basically concerned with how the various aspects of a society or culture are constituted and interrelated to form a whole. The functional study of culture places emphasis on the systematic nature of culture, and sees the different aspects of culture as parts of an integrated system.

As we have noted above, early anthropological theories were dominated by evolutionism and diffusionism. As a theory of society, functionalism arose in anthropology to deal with ethnocentrism of early students who found ways of "primitive" peoples incomprehensible and quickly dismissed them as primitive, naive, or simply wrong. Functionalism opened up the notion that in all societies the various features, mores, and ways of doing things are tied together in a functional whole that works towards the solution of the society's various problems of adaptation, integration, tension management, and pattern maintenance (Chalfant, Beckley & Palmer 1981:29-30)

The emergence of functionalism in the twentieth century constituted a major paradigm shift in anthropology. Functionalism became a dominant

theory in British social anthropology. The leading anthropologists to adopt the functionalist approaches to the study of religion were Malinowski (1884-1942) and Raddcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). Most of their writings were concentrated on small scale societies, particularly the "primitive" societies of Africa and Melanesia.

Functionalism asserts the uniqueness of each socio-cultural institution, custom, or belief to perform a function within a particular social structure. Functional analysis tends to describe the interrelational elements of a cultural system while suspending value judgements regarding specific customs or behavior of people. The importance of functionalism to our study lies in the fact that functionalists are particularly interested in finding out what social or psychological problems are solved by religious beliefs and practices. The question often raised is; How is this done? To what extent and how does a religious system help to express, codify, and reaffirm the central values of a society?

From the functionalist perspective a custom or belief persists in a society by reason of the fact that it performs some functions or fulfills in some way the necessary conditions of existence of a society of that type. This helps us to understand why in spite of various years of condemnation by Christian missionaries and colonial authorities certain aspects of their traditional religious beliefs and practices have persisted.

Functionalist analysis of culture provides some helpful insights for any agent of change such as missionaries and development workers. It appears that many of the early missionaries and other development agencies, often saw their work solely in terms of either winning people for Christ or introducing Western civilization and so failed to understand the systemic nature of the group.

An important concept in the functionalist study of culture is the idea of "cultural conservatism." This implies the preference and maintenance of traditional ways of acting, forms of social interaction and cultural patterns. Cultural conservatism implies that every culture has a built in drive toward continuity. It is the role of tradition in a society to preserve something about its past which will enable people to look forward to the future. According to Whiteman (1984:33) this "provides personal security for individuals in the society for one can assume, with some degree of reliance, that what has worked in the past will work in the future."

In societies like the Akan, where oral tradition is the dominant way of transmitting knowledge and values, there is an inherent tendency to be resistant to change. The continuing role played by the ancestors, and the practice of traditional medicine in the face of modern medicine among the Akans, are typical examples of cultural conservatism. Other aspects of traditional culture expressed in the form of ideas, values, beliefs, and worldviews have often resisted change.

Functionalism is criticized for its reductionist view of culture and society, and its exaggeration regarding the consistency, harmony, balance, purposefulness, and wholeness of culture and society (Luzbetak 1988:147). One danger with the functionalist approach to culture, however, is the temptation to falsify the function of a particular element in a culture. One may therefore be tempted to look for the function of a particular element in a culture, whereas in the minds of the people such functions do not really exist.

Contribution of Functionalism to Missiology

In spite of its weakness as a theory, functionalism has contributed much to anthropology and missiology. Schreiter (1985:45-47) points out the usefulness of functionalism to the cross-cultural worker in the area of missionary adaptation and cross cultural communication. According to Schrieter functional anthropology is most useful in constructing local theologies because of its holistic concerns, the attention to context, and the concern for rich empirical detail. Schreiter further affirms that:

Functionalist approaches are well suited to translation approaches in local theology. They have formed the basis for developing "functional substitutes", the replacing of one ritual or myth or magical practice with an empirical correlate from the Christian tradition. (1985:47)

Another contribution of functionalism is that it has enabled cross cultural workers, particularly missionaries, to have more respect and appreciation for the various cultures. As we will observe later in the study,

the attitude towards other cultures during the nineteenth century by missionaries and anthropologists alike was often a blatant disregard if not disrespect for those cultures they regarded as "primitive." The rise of functionalism has helped to correct the ethnocentric and arrogant attitude of Westerners towards other cultures.

It must be noted however, that even today not all people have that sense of genuine appreciation of other cultures. There is a tendency for people to look at other cultures through a purely Christian or Western lens. This often blinds them to see the good things in those cultures that are not contrary to the Christian message and can enrich the Christian faith as well.

Functionalism also led to a greater understanding of the degree of integration among the many component parts of culture, and the chain reaction that results when a particular cultural practice is condemned or discouraged. For example to ask an Akan not to participate in certain traditional rites is to set him apart from the external family in which he or she is a part. This might often result in social dislocation.

Functionalism provides us with a theoretical framework for understanding why certain religious beliefs and practices persist in a society. In a society like the Akan with a strong sense of community cohesion, where traditional religion is at the core of the culture, it is not surprising to find the continuity of traditional religion because of the function the religion plays in that society. Many of the Akan traditional rites are performed for the simple

reason that they address a people's particular needs, especially when life in the community has been threatened. As Sarpong (1981:240) observes "many an African custom no matter how repulsive it may be to a modern mind, once played or even plays a role in the social life of the people." Their persistence could be explained by the fact that the church has not been responsive to those needs nor has it provided functional substitutes for them. The gospel has not been experienced in all areas of their lives.

A complete break with the past is not easily achieved. Nevertheless, if Christianity is to be integrated into the daily lives of the people, it will have to perform the same functions of the former beliefs. We must also note that the function performed by religion in one culture may not necessarily perform the same function in another culture. It appears that some of the early missionaries overlooked this, and thought that what was good for the Westerner was also good for the African. Thus, little efforts were made at contextualizing the gospel message to make it more relevant to the Africans.

One finds that most of the Akan traditional rites have some social meanings. Puberty rites for example, serve to introduce girls into the society of women. Missionary activities have often been criticized on the grounds that by discouraging some traditional practices like puberty rites because they are ungodly, they have eroded the traditional moral values and contributed to a high incidence of adultery, promiscuity, and abortion. An editorial in *Ghanaian*

Times on March 11 1992, called the church to task by posing the following question:

How come that the malignant of cultural practices as unchristian has come with the increasing school age immorality? When the performance of puberty rites was obligatory, cultural mark of sexual decency, was teenage pregnancy in the old days ever such a disaster as it is today?

When evening folk drumming and dancing was the respected practice, did it present immoral diversions for the youth as it does now that it is supposed to have been sublimated by Christian influences?

The above editorial was responding in particular to the lamentations by one of the traditional rulers that many valuable norms and practices of the nation's cultural heritage have been branded ungodly. In the view of the paper it is cynical "that godly postures of the cultural rejectionist do not tally with moral tests."

While we recognize the importance of functionalism in helping us understand the persistence of certain aspects of a people's culture, there are nevertheless other factors that may account for the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices. For example Barry S. Hewlett (1990:48) has identified the cultural transmission model as playing an important role in cultural conservatism.

Religious Change

Religious change is part of cultural change since religion and culture are very much related. The same models that apply to cultural change also hold

true for religious change. Religious change takes place by the addition of new elements, the discarding of the old ones, and the modification of existing ones (Malefijt 1968:355). New elements may originate within the culture itself, but they are most frequently borrowed from others. In neither instance are changes wholly abrupt. As Malefijt has observed, "new" religions have been continuations of older ones: Christianity incorporated many Jewish elements, Protestantism built on Catholicism, Buddhism sprang from Brahmanism. (1968:355)

The development of religious cults and movements are an example of religious change. They are a recurrent feature of cultural contact between Western and non-Western societies; but they are found in Western societies as well. In the literature one finds various names given to these movements or cults; nativistic movements, revivalistic movements, messianic movement, millinery movements, or prophet cults. Evidently these various designations are related to one's understanding of the movements. Wallace has suggested the term revitalization movements to describe movements of this nature. According to him the common factor in these movements is that they are "deliberate, conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to create a more satisfying culture" (1956:279). The African Independent Churches are good examples of such movements.

In many African societies external forces like Christianity and Islam impinging upon their belief systems have resulted in religious change in those

societies. The problem, however, is that many who have adopted these new religions appear to not have made a complete break with the old traditional religion. They continue to indulge in some of the beliefs and practices pertaining to the African traditional religion either openly or "Nicodemously."

One would say that religious changes have occurred only on the surface without a significant change underneath. Change usually occurs at two levels in a culture; one is the observable or formal level of the culture which include people's behavior. The other relates to the conceptual level like ideas, values, attitudes etc. Changes at the observable level usually occur more quickly than those at the conceptual level.

There is persuasive evidence that when people change their religion, such as a change from African traditional religion to Christianity, the change usually occurs at the surface or observable level. In most cases the traditional culture which expresses itself in the form of ideas, values, beliefs, and world-views are either slow to change or resist change altogether. Can we say then that conversion has occurred in the true sense of the word?

Religious Change in Africa

Over the past years many African societies have experienced some religious change due to the impact of Christianity and Islam. It has to be conceded that Christianity has seriously modified traditional religions and has occasionally driven them underground. The emergence of religious

movements of all kinds is a consequence of religious changes occurring in Africa. The underlying feature of these processes of change is conversion from the traditional African religion to either Christianity or Islam. But of late many of the other religions in the world like Buddhism and Hare Krishna movements have been present and are gaining some converts.

Religious conversion has attracted the attention of not only theologians but social scientists as well. Anthropologists and social psychologists have studied the nature and functions of conversion. Such studies have often related to cults and sects, and generally in the area of social change. Conversion to any religion is a kind of innovation that leads to culture change. This is particularly true when a new religion is introduced from another culture.

Anthropologically, there are cultural factors involved in the process of conversion. According to missionary anthropologist Charles Kraft, underlying all cultural behavior are a sizable number of basic assumptions concerning reality and how to respond to it. These assumptions are known as a worldview. Kraft affirms that these assumptions provide the guidance people ordinarily follow when they engage in activities such as interpreting, evaluating, explaining, making commitments, relating, and adapting (Kraft 1992:264). Kraft further affirms that worldview assumptions play a crucial part in the conversion process.

Elsewhere Kraft (1979:335-38) points out that the process of conversion is made up of a multitude of decisions by human beings in interaction with God. Each of these decisions may be conceived of as a result of a process involving points of stimulus, realization, decision, and a "new habit" interspersed with periods of developing awareness, consideration, and incorporation. The decision to incorporate a new belief or practice issues in a new habit or set of habits.

Kraft again affirms that:

Real thoroughgoing change needs to register at both deep (worldview) and surface levels of culture. That is, the assumptions, values, and allegiances that lie deeply embedded beneath the surface of cultural behavior need to be changed to support whatever changes are made in behavior if the change is to be pervasive. (1992:271)

Studies such as Tippet (1977, 1987) and Lofland and Stark (1965) point to the conclusion that conversion is a multifaceted, complex process. As Rambo has pointed out,

Conversion may be understood as a process that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, experiences, ideas, and groups. Cultural, social, personal, religious, and other dimensions all infuse and shape the process in different settings.(1990:229)

Rambo (1990:228) identifies seven discernible stages which are; (a) context, (b) crisis, (c) quest, (d) encounter, (e) interaction, (f) commitment (g) consequence.

The last two stages are particularly relevant for our study. According to Rambo during the commitment stage, the converts decide if the new way of life is superior to the old and actively break with the past. In the consequence

stage, the experience of a new way of life and a sense of power consolidates the new beliefs. The persistence of traditional beliefs and practices among many Akan Christians, makes one to wonder whether conversion has fully occurred.

Theologically conversion is a human response to the love of God expressed in Christ. The experience occurs in many different ways for different people. It is a decision-making process that is accompanied by a change in lifestyle. In Hebrew and Greek the words translated as "conversion"—*shub*, *strephein*, *epistrephein*, *metanoia*—mean to turn, turn again and return. All this imply that people are moving in the wrong direction, and therefore need to turn or return to God. In the New Testament "conversion" refers specifically to people's response to the call of God in Christ.

Conversion in traditional societies in Africa like the Akan can be seen as the decision of an individual or group to change affiliation from the old traditional religion to Christianity or Islam. Such conversion occurs in a context of cross-cultural contact. What one commonly observes in religious change about people in such traditional societies changing to another religion such as Christianity, is a mixing and fusion of cultural elements. The result,—if not "syncretism"—may be called inculturation, accommodation, adaptation, indigenization, or contextualization.

What often happens in syncretism is that a new surface behavior is combined with essentially unchanged deep-level assumptions to produce a new brand of

religion in which the new surface-level forms make it look as though the people have converted. Much of popular religion in Latin America and the African Independent churches suffers from this problem. As Schineller aptly observes:

Many of the traditional figures of popular religious cults in Latin America- as for instance in Brazil, where religious movements often have African roots - are viewed as co-equal with the Christian communion of saints. The result is often the modification and lessening of the challenge from gospel values. In Cuba, the Yoruba (West Africa) divinities of Elegbara and Ogun have been identified with St. Peter and St. John the Baptist. Such attempts to Christian traditional figures may result in pagan elements predominating over Christian values. (1992:51)

We must not identify syncretism as only a problem with societies of the Two-third world. The problem exists in another form in most societies in the West where for example Christianity has been overpowered by the values of the modern world and pagan values rather, than Christian principles. Lesslie Newbigin (1987:2-7) is right when he speaks of the neopaganism of the West. According to Newbigin Christians too easily identify with contemporary Western culture and lose the ability to be critical in the light of the Gospel. A typical example here is the Christmas tree which has become an important aspect of Christmas celebration.

In most situations associated with syncretism, changes are made on the surface without corresponding changes at the deep level. Alan Tippett (1987:168-74) has called this condition "submersion." There is always a concern among certain sections of the Christian community that dialogue with other

religions may lead to syncretism and hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. Peter Schineller (1992:50-53) advocates that we drop "syncretism" from the missiological vocabulary because it invites fruitless argument and deflects from the real issue: how to decide what qualifies as authentic, valid inculturation.

The existence of split-level Christianity among the Akans is related to this problem associated with socio-religious change where conversion appears to have occurred only at the surface level rather than at the deep level. If conversion should be genuine, then it must occur at both the surface and deep levels. In other words it must occur at the worldview level.

African Response to Christianity

What has been the Africans' response to the Christian message? We need to understand the process of mission proselytizing in Africa on the one hand, and the African response to conversion on the other. There are several studies in the literature that deal with how conversion has occurred in many African societies (cf. Peel 1968, Horton 1971, and Okorocha 1987). These studies have contributed to our understanding of religious conversion in Africa.

In his classic monograph on the Yoruba society, Peel (1968) adopts what one might regard as an "intellectualist" approach to the problem of conversion to Christianity in Africa. Peel points out the inadequacy of previous attributions of the causes of the independent church movement to "anomie"

and "deprivation." According to Peel the Yoruba traditional religion is characterized by what he considers to be a "this-worldly" versus an "other-worldly" perspective which forms the mental habits of the people.

Peel further affirms that the traditional Yoruba cults were only loosely articulated with each other, and with the social organization; they were concerned above all with easing conditions of life in this world. The looseness of integration of their cults, and the fact that these cults were not seen as underpinning the social status quo, made it particularly easy for Yorubas to accept the new cult of Christianity; for in the circumstances, they saw it neither as a threat to the existing religious set-up nor to the existing patterns of social organization. According to Peel, Yoruba religion is an essentially this-worldly instrument; the version of Christianity they came to accept was also this-worldly. This was somehow incompatible with the other-worldly focus of the missionary churches, and hence the demand for an independent institutional framework which found its realization in the *Aladura* sects.

Horton (1971) attempts to modify Peel's work by replacing Peel's "this-worldly" versus "other-worldly" terminology with his own "explanation-prediction-control" versus "communion" language. Where Peel characterized Yoruba traditional religion as this-worldly and Christianity as other-worldly, Horton would affirm that Yoruba religion is both a system of "explanation-prediction control" and "communion."

Horton offers a model of the "typical traditional cosmology" which according to him consists of two tiers: the "microcosm" (the lesser spirits) and the "macrocosm" (high god). He explains that in the pre-Christian phase, the lesser spirits are emphasized to the exclusion of the supreme being. As the outside world impinges on the traditional culture, the lesser spirits are thought to be retreating - under the advance of the high god. Islam or Christianity, bringing the message of the supremacy of the One God, will quite obviously have great appeal.

In a follow up of these earlier studies Okorocha (1987) affirms that religious conversion in Africa is best understood in terms of power encounter between two systems of salvation, resulting in a drift of the people in the direction of **power**. Elsewhere Okorocha argues that:

Religious conversion in Africa, because of the nature of *homo religiosus Africanus*, is best understood as a religious experience. Sociological factors in that encounter that result in conversion are important only as catalysts. (1992:168)

Okorocha further observes that:

The determinant factors in the people's response to a change agent have their roots in the nature of the inherent religious values or *pietas*. Therefore to understand religious conversion in Africa, one needs to look closely at African religiousness and its goals. (1992:168)

Although the above studies are related to the Yoruba society of West Africa, they nevertheless offer some insights for understanding conversion to Christianity in other African societies such as the Akan.

As Okorocha has suggested, African conversion may best be interpreted as a case of power encounter. Thus Akans will embrace a religion as long as it provides power. This power encounter is in consonance with the Akan religious cosmology in which the universe is believed to be peopled with malevolent spirits. The Akans will therefore espouse any religious system that appears to have power to deliver them from this host of evil spirits. Traditional religion fulfilled the role of protecting Africans from the evil powers that be. Okorocha is right in pointing out that,

African peoples, therefore expect power in the form of *mana* to emanate from religious forms. The religiousness of any belief system is measured in terms of its *mana* context and its viability in terms of its *mana* effect. This *mana* is not political, economic, or even occultic power. It is a "mysterious something" which is utterly desirable and yet somewhat mystifying and elusive: similar to Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. (1992:170)

In the traditional religious system people have sought for religious practitioners or specialists who are more powerful in counteracting other spiritual forces. Thus the Akan will say *aduru bi kye aduru bi* meaning some powers are more potent than others. The concept of power encounter is not only true of Akans but most other peoples. The Bible itself is full of examples of such power encounters as in the case of Moses and the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt (Exodus 7:8-13).

One reason why African Independent Churches have found ready adherence among many Akans is because of the power they promise to offer to their adherents. The missiological implication of all this is that only a

religion that demonstrates power is more likely to appeal to the Akans. The African believes a religion is useful and worthy of profession only if it embodies and imparts power, otherwise it is rejected and a more powerful alternative is sought (Okorochoa 1992:171).

The introduction of Christianity and Islam has resulted in the emergence of various religious movements in many societies in Africa. These new religious movements, have exerted much influence on the religious scene. In many cases they are expressing a new kind of religious creativity. Many of these new religious movements have appropriated symbols from traditional religion but given them a new twist and in some cases Christian interpretation.

Some of the African Independent Churches (AICs) display some characteristics of the old religion. But despite their syncretistic tendencies they have a lot to teach the historic churches in the sense that they point a way to a relevant missionary methodology in Africa by their incorporation of concepts which are at the core of the African worldview. They address the fears, hopes, and disappointments of the African people which the historic churches have tended to neglect. As Harold Turner has correctly observed:

The African Independent Churches reflect the effort of primal societies to readjust to traditional life, either by repelling the invading culture through a revitalized traditional religion, or by adopting a new faith largely drawn from the West but recast in local patterns. (1979:332)

Most of the practices in these Churches reinforce old traditional beliefs and can be said to be attempts to express Christianity in the idioms and language of the people.

Elsewhere Harold Turner gives a topological description of the whole gamut of movements growing out of the interaction between primal religions and Western Christianity in second-stage responses includes: neo-primal movements, syncretistic movements, Hebraistic movements, independent churches, and autonomous indigenous churches directly related to missionary endeavor (Harold Turner 1981:49). In the first-stage response of Africans to Western Christian impact, this range of expression did not appear as such because the religious reality embodied in these types was totally under missionary tutelage. Yet, different phases of religious understanding persisted within the new Christian communities, particularly as new Christians joined the churches. Such phases would later appear as independent movements.

Summary

This chapter gives a theoretical framework to our study and sets the stage for the other chapters to follow. Briefly one has considered in this chapter religious and culture change in a traditional society. Since culture has so much to do with human behavior, it was deemed necessary to take a look at how cultures change. From our discussion above it becomes very clear that

for any religio-cultural changes to occur among the Akans it must take into consideration the process of culture change.

The introduction of Christianity among the Akans involves a cultural change. The history of many African societies have been marked by many years of Christian and Muslim proselytizing which has contributed to cultural changes in these societies. But in spite of the intensity of these missionary efforts, there is persuasive evidence that African religions continue to manifest vitality everywhere. For example, belief in ancestors and the traditional religious practices associated with them still persist among many Akans. The Faith and Order Consultation of the World Council of Churches at a meeting in Accra (Ghana) noted that, "for all Africans, even after many years of Christianity, and standing fully within the Christian Revelation, the spirituality and the world-view of their fathers is still very present" (1974:3).

We will conclude this section by submitting that many African societies have experienced changes through colonization, missionization, and the impact of developments in science and technology and improvement in worldwide communications. In spite of these changes certain aspects of their culture especially those concerned with religious practices have resisted change. Religious change or conversion in Africa appears to be a complex phenomenon which calls for more detailed study. It involves much more than people identifying themselves as either Muslims or Christians. The situation is

therefore more complex than meets the eye. It does not often lend itself to easy analysis or prediction.

End Notes

1. It is interesting to observe that the new age movements which appeal to many people in the West have some animistic elements in their teaching such as belief in spiritual powers or forces.
2. The work of Redfield (1930), Mead (1932), and Herskovits (1937), are examples of American acculturation studies.
3. Barnett (1953) discusses in detail how a receptor people react to new ways.
4. A discussion I had with a friend from Haiti revealed certain elements of Ghanaian culture are found in Haiti. For detail discussion on continuity of African culture in the New World see Melville Herskovits (1941).
5. The phenomenon of spirit possession in Black Churches in America in my opinion is another continuity of African religion in which spirit possession plays a role. A similar thing can also be said of the various responses or interjection from the worshippers that is a characteristic of Black preaching. It is common in Ghana that when a libation prayer is offered, the worshippers respond to the prayers.

CHAPTER 3

Akan Religious Beliefs and Practices

An understanding of the problem of split-level Christianity requires some insights into the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Akans. A people's interpretation of the universe is shown in conduct: in daily activities, in human relations, rites of passage, in avoidances as well as observances.

Men and women across the ages have understood their spirituality in different ways, and they have sought to relate with God or the ultimate being in different ways. Akan spirituality is rooted in the Akan traditional religions which existed long before other religions like Christianity and Islam were introduced. Akan religion has neither written scriptures nor a self-conscious systematic theology. For the Akans religion is a life experience and, as Kofi Opoku points out, "the religion of Africa does not live in the pages of books on world religions, rather it *lives in the hearts and lives of African people who practice it* (1988:14).¹ What Malefijt (1968:11) says of religion as "a system of belief and action" is very much true of Akan religion because the belief system is so intimately related to the behavioral aspects, and each cannot be fully understood without the other.

Social Organization of the Akans

The large aggregate of tribes that comprise the Akan peoples of Ghana exhibit a high degree of cultural homogeneity, but some differences in traditional practices do occur however. Generally the similarities in the cultures of the various Akan peoples outnumber their differences.

E. H. Mends a Ghanaian sociologist has observed six basic elements in Ghanaian culture:

- (1) The stress or importance that is attached to group life.
- (2) The importance of kinship as represented in the institutional form of the extended family system irrespective of the difference of descent systems.
- (3) Chiefship and its symbolic significance.
- (4) The pervasiveness and stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life.
- (5) The idea of beauty of speech, thought, action and appearance as a prerequisite for appointment to high office.
- (6) The tendency to stress, in all forms of art, the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty and virtue. (1975:2)

The Fante group of the Akan people will be the focus of our discussion. No general account of the Akan religion would be adequate without recognizing the significant role played by the *ebusua* (matrilineal clan) and the role of "sacral chieftaincy". In any given Akan state the *ebusua* is the key in the social organization. Basically there are seven *ebusua* each of which has a totem.² Membership in this exogamous grouping is accorded at birth. The relationship is based on the belief that all members of the matrilineal clan are blood relatives by virtue of their descent from a common ancestress from whom they inherited the same blood.

The Akan child realize early in life that apart from the immediate family, he or she has maternal relatives traced back to the great grandmother. The *ebusua* or the clan is the bulwark of Akan society. Its various functions include; (1) regulating marriage, (2) supporting relatives in time of need, (3) arranging and supervising funerals of its members, (4) ensuring that traditional rites especially those relating to the ancestors are carried out. Corporateness and group solidarity are an important aspect of the Akan social life. The *ebusua* acts as a second line of support to the members of the family and strengthen it, giving cohesion to the whole society. As Taylor (1963:93) rightly observes it is in the context of the life of the extended family or the clan that the "African learns to say, I am because I participate. To him the individual is always an abstraction; man is a family."

Historically the Fantes at one time were living at Techiman in the area of Ghana of what is now called Brong-Ahafo. Fante tradition indicates that due to conflict with a neighboring people they left Techiman and began a migration to the coast during the latter part of the 13th century, and arrived on the coast some fifty or hundred years later. Their first settlement was at Mankessim.³

Fante Cosmology and Myth

The cosmology of a people includes the beliefs prevalent in that social group regarding the supernatural, the natural, and social worlds, and the symbols and rites associated with such beliefs. In traditional African society understanding of the universe is essentially religious knowledge. The whole of human existence derives its meaning and significance from religion. Thus the Akans rely primarily on religious knowledge as their basis for knowing and understanding the universe. To the Akan, the spiritual world is not only a reality, it is also very near. Again the two spheres of the universe, the physical and the spiritual, are indivisible with one on intertwined with the other.

In Fante religious cosmology there are three recurring facets which can be described as belief in a Supreme Being, belief in spirits or deities, and belief in ancestors. The universe is also viewed as permanent, unending, and eternal.

God and Creation

We begin by affirming that Akan religion is "theistic" in the sense that it deals with a personal Supreme Being. The Fantes believe in God as the Supreme Being known variously as *Nyame* or *Nyankopon*, and *Odomankoma*. The Akans believe that the universe did not come into being on its own volition. They believe that everything had its origin in *Nyame* and nothing came into existence without divine sanction; even the deities and the spirits

derive their powers from him. As the creator of the universe he is charged with power, both beneficent and dangerous. *Nyame* as the Creator is also the sustainer of the universe. It is worth noting that the missionaries adopted the Fante name for the Supreme Being into Christian preaching.

The nature of God from Akan belief can be gathered from the qualities attributed to him. *Nyame* is held in high esteem. The natural attributes of God come from his primary function as *Oboadze* (the creator). As the Supreme Being he is regarded as *Otumfo* (all powerful). He is given many praise names such as *Twereduapon* (lean on a tree and do not fall), *Odomankoma* (he who gives in abundance).

The Fantes have other praise names for God which attribute both gender characteristics to God. Some of these names are *Obaatan pa* (good mother or father) *Asaase Yaa* or *Asaase Effua* (God or Goddess of the earth) *Twerapong Kwame* (God on whom you can lean).⁴ It must be pointed out here that the issue concerning the gender of God which Western Christians are struggling with is not a problem for the Akans. The Akan concept of God does not present such a problem, because God can be conceived in both gender forms, and the question of whether God should be referred to as "She" or "He" has not been a major preoccupation for the Akan.

Nyame also features prominently in Ghanaian art. Designs and patterns stamped into cloths and on carvings bear names which refers to God or to his attributes. Sarpong (1974:10) notes that the *Gye Nyame* (God alone is great)

design depicting the power of God is now a common place thing. In everyday talk and speech *Nyame* is often mentioned. The existence of God is commonly assumed. There is a Fante saying that *obi nkyere abofra Nyame* which means no one can point out God to a child, implying, that God is self evident and is all around.⁵ The question of the existence of God is therefore not an epistemological problem. As a matter of fact, one hardly comes across an Akan who claims to be an atheist.

Nyame is the creator and sustainer of the universe but he is more or less transcendent and not involved in the everyday life of the people. The use of his name in everyday parlance also suggests that he is immanent. For example when people are bidding good-bye to each other they say *enye Nyame nnko* which means may God go with you.

Mythology and legends about God and creation. Mythologies abound in Africa; different tribal groups possess their own myths. They are not only the creation accounts of the groups but the origin of the cosmos. Among the Akans myth and legends form an important aspect of the traditional life. Mythologies are narratives which sacralize the accepted cosmos, showing in memorable form and suggestive phrase how various parts of the world come into being, or better still as a generalization, how everything came to be as it is now (Trompf 1991:18). Some of these myths and legends relate to creation, divine or supernatural beings, family ancestry, and activities.

now (Trompf 1991:18). ~~Some of these myths and legends relate to creation, divine or supernatural beings, family ancestry, and activities.~~

Myths often support beliefs, actions, and codes of behavior. They often have a teaching or message to give. Akan mythologies include some important stories about the creation and the split between God and humankind. In one myth, the Supreme Being *Nyame*, became annoyed by the noise made by a woman who was pounding *fufu* (mashed and pounded cassava and plantain) in a wooden mortar and *Nyame* withdrew far away from mankind as a result.

Another version attributes *Nyame's* withdrawal to the fact that when the women made *fufu* (a local dish), the ends of their *fufu* pounding sticks which are extremely long hit *Nyame* up there in the sky so hard that in his anger *Nyame* went farther and farther away, and resolved to recede from humankind.

Parrinder (1969:32) has noted that almost identical myths are told in Eastern Africa. The Numba of the Sudan say that the sky once pressed down so low that women could not lift their spoons high enough to stir the porridge without getting their hands burnt on the pot. One day a woman forced her spoon right through the sky and it went off in anger. One observes that in these stories there is a virtual identification of God with the sky.

These myths explain the creation and the separation of humankind from God. The action of humans causes God to withdraw. The stories look back to a golden age when God lived among humans and there was no pain or death.

As Boateng (1990:114) has noted, a careful analysis of this myth shows that God did not become angry and punish the woman. He only left her to herself. Again it implies that God wants to be with humans, but human disobedience does not allow him to do so. It is therefore the fault of humankind that there is suffering. Again the myth also explains that even though God is so far from humans, he takes a keen interest in human affairs.⁶

While the creation myth suggests that God is perceived as far removed from humankind, and as having no interest in the daily lives of the people, the references to *Nyame* which frequently occur in everyday conversation suggest his immanence. A common form of farewell is to say *nye Nyame nnko*, "Go with God." Thus while the otherness of God is affirmed as in the creation myths, he is also immanent in the sense that he is involved in his creation at the same time.

In addition to the creation myths which attribute the creation of the world to God, there are other stories that give humans a more natural origin. According to one popular myth the Fantes originated from a hole in the ground in Ashanti.

Worship of God

The various affirmations the Fantes give to *Nyame* (God) creates the impression that he is worshiped in the same way as God is worshiped in Christianity. But a closer study of Akan traditional worship reveals

considerable amount of ambiguity about the Akan concepts of relating to and worshipping *Nyame*. In spite of *Nyame's* honorific titles and the everyday affirmation of his name, and the complexity of traditional religious ceremonies, there is little prayer to God directly, even though he is constantly in people's thought and speech. In fact *Nyame* is never directly worshipped and no religious ceremonies are held strictly for him. Christensen makes the same observation:

Nyame has no priesthood, and no ceremonies are held specifically for the purpose of invoking his goodwill. Yet though there is little direct worship of *Nyame*, it would be incorrect to assume that the Fante are not constantly cognizant of his existence.
(1959:259)

The primacy of God is however evident in the prayers to the ancestors and gods in the form of libation. *Nyame's* name is invoked first before the names of the gods and the ancestors are mentioned.

Rattray in his classical study of the Ashantis reports of temples erected in honor of the Supreme Being. He affirms that almost every Ashanti compound had its *Nyame dua*, a triple forked branch set upright in the ground, serving as a an altar on which a bowl or pot for offering often rested (1927:139-42). This was confirmed to me by an informant who acknowledged that it was the practice that every morning the householder would use the dew collected in the pot sprinkle it on the household members with these words affirming the triune God:

Tworampong Kwame (God)

Asaase Efuah (Mother God)

Bosompo Kwame (God of the Sea)⁷

Such alters or *Nyame dua* are rarely seen today, if they have not completely disappeared altogether.

Belief in spirits and deities. The belief in a Supreme Being is held along with the belief in lesser deities who are also charged with power both beneficent and dangerous. These lesser spirits are believed to serve as mediators between God and humans. As Busia aptly remarks of the Ashantis:

The universe is full of spirits. There is the Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, who created all things, and who manifests his power through a pantheon of gods; below this there are lesser spirits which animate trees, animals or charms; and there are the ever present spirits of the ancestors (*nsamanfo*) whose constant contact with the life of man on earth brings the world of the spirits so close to the land of the living. (1954:191)

These supernatural entities or lesser gods or *abosom*, derive their powers from *Nyame*. Most of them are believed to dwell in rivers, lakes, rocks, or other natural phenomena. It is believed that they take notice of human actions; they desire human attention and are pleased when honor is paid to them, as well as displeased by neglect.

The deities can further the welfare of humankind in conformity with the society's desire and goals; thus they can make crops grow, increase the fertility of the soil and humankind, and punish those who depart from the established

rules of the society. The gods are not invariably good; they have moods and are sometimes destructive and whimsical. Many of the deities are served by priests who often go into ecstasy spontaneously or by techniques perfected by long practice.

Christensen (1959:260) affirms that each of the traditional Fante states is reported to have seventy-seven gods,⁸ but this number bears no relation to the actual number of sacred rocks, streams, and lagoons, which are far more numerous but designated as being associated with deities. Again not every one of these is served by priests.

The *abosom* or gods are intangible powers and limitless in number. They are believed to dwell in natural objects like the sea, rivers, lakes, rocks, trees, etc. They manifest themselves in various ways such as randomly seizing or possessing an individual. One therefore observes that spirit possession is a major phenomenon in the Akan religion. The *abosom* are understood to be evanescent like the wind and manifest themselves in and through it. They may at times be seen by people who have "spiritual eyes." According to Christensen (1959:261) "they are anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, or a combination of these, and are described as either human or animal, of unusual size and appearance, or as half-human and half-animal." There are hundreds of *abosom* who may be invoked individually or as a **group**.

The Fantes had a national shrine called Nananom Pow⁹ located near Mankessim. According to tradition, this sacred grove was the burial place of

the three patriarchs who are said to have led the Fantes from Techiman. Their names are *Oburumankuma*, *Osuon*, and *Odapagyan*. For a very long time this sacred grove was a national shrine served by priests.

The chiefs and people offered sacrifices to the *Nananom* and consulted them for assistance in case of need due to the belief in its supernatural nature. For more than a century *Nananom Pow* has ceased playing an active role in Fante religion because the priests at the shrine were prosecuted for duplicity and fraud by the British colonial government. We will say more about this when we discuss early Methodist missionary activities.

Worship of the deities. The Fante cosmology regards the creator as absent or withdrawn from human affairs. Belief and ritual are focused instead on the *abosom* who are conventionally understood to be "children" or "messengers" of Nyame. There is a saying that *epe asem aka akyere Nyame a ka kyere mframa* which literally mean "if one wants to speak to God one must speak to the wind." The implication of this saying is that one cannot speak directly to *Nyame* (God). Perhaps this is in line with the Akan protocol that one cannot speak directly to a chief. He or she must do so through the *okyeame* or spokesperson. According to the Akan custom, the chief speaks to an assembly, or to any person through an *okyeame* who repeats the chief's words to those people or person being addressed. The *okyeame* usually speaks with the staff of office in his hand. The office of the *okyeame* is one of those

traditional offices that is not hereditary. It is given to people who are most fit and qualified for it by reason of their possession of wit, eloquence, and intelligence, coupled with a commanding presence and good personality.

Many of the *abosom* are usually associated with groves of trees. There are therefore many places about the bush surrounding a town where people go to worship the *abosom*. Inside these places are eggs, fruits, pots, bottles--offerings given to the *abosom*. The trees in such groves are regarded as sacred, and great penalties are attached to felling or otherwise injuring them. If for some reason they have to be felled, some customary rites are to be performed with the priest officiating. Some of my informants narrated to me instances where failure to perform such rites resulted in some calamities.

In crisis moments the *abosom* are consulted. They propose solutions, offer advice, and make predictions. They give utterance through the *akomfo* or priests who become possessed. While in this state of possession, priests talk in a low, guttural voice or, in a high falsetto, indicating that the deity is speaking through them. Their guttural speech is usually unintelligible to all but the trained assistant who serves as *okyeame* or *abrafo* and interprets their message.

Many of the priests also function as traditional healers who aid or cure by manipulating the supernatural. To the Fante, illness and death may be due to either natural or supernatural causes. The priests are particularly consulted when an illness or death is suspected to have some supernatural cause. In such situations, the priests may, either on their own volition or at the request

of the client, consult their gods and through divination ascertain the cause of the illness or death. The priests are consulted on all manner of problems ranging from illness, to lost articles, including personal problems.

There is also belief in the existence of forest beings known as *mbotsia* (dwarfs) and *sasabonsam* (terrifying giants) which are rarely seen but much talked about as terrors of the forest. The *Mbotsia* whose feet turn backwards are believed to possess supernatural powers which are used for both good and evil. The *mbotsia* can kidnap people, and hide them in the forest from human sight. They would send them back home later endowing them with spiritual power. Such people would utilize the power supposedly acquired from their captives (dwarfs) for many purposes, including healing, magic and charms.¹⁰

Concept of Evil

The problem of evil has been a major discussion in Western philosophy and Christian theology. Such discussion focuses upon the problem of the goodness of God in the face of evil. Here lies a major distinction between Akan and Christian views of deity. For the Akan the problem of evil does not arise. The Akan often attribute evil occurrences in this world to the powers and principalities which include bad spirits, magical forces, and witches. For example, some illnesses, deaths, and misfortunes are believed to be under the remote control of some spiritual forces. One of the functions of the traditional priests or medicine men is to diagnose the causes of misfortune and to

prescribe some spiritual remedy for it. While the Western mind tends to explain those strange happenings in naturalistic and scientific terms to a greater extent than do Africans, the latter are not without their own theories of reality. Busia (1955:4) writes:

When the African offers an egg to a tree, or food to a dead ancestor, he is not expressing ignorance of material substances, or natural causes, but he is expressing in conduct a theory of reality, namely that behind the visible substance of things lie essences, or powers which constitute their true nature... I am not aware of any agreed Christian view of Nature, but I submit that there is an African one which is that Nature has power which may be revered as well as used for man's benefit.

Magic, Charms, and Witchcraft

The Fantes (and indeed all Akan groups) believe in the power of magic, charms, and witchcraft or *ayen*. Witchcraft is generally believed to be a malevolent force that is a projection of the will or soul of the person who possesses it. It is believed that a person may be born with this power or acquire it at any age. Such a person may have the ability to move rapidly through space and may attack victims by biting them, sucking their blood, or by making the *sunsum* (spirit) ill. The victims need not die but may suffer illness, sterility, or fail to achieve success in life.

It is believed that this form of magical power is held to be effective only within the bounds of the matrilineal clan. If persons possessing the power of witchcraft or *ayen* wish to harm someone outside their lineage, they must do so with the collaboration of a clan member of their intended victim. There are

several cases where people have been accused of being *ayen* and made to confess.¹¹ Many of the cults are particularly efficacious at "catching witches" as well as providing protection against evil magic. On the other hand *Asuman* (charms), the generic term applied to objects or mixtures made for the purpose of protection, assistance, or for the punishment of some specified enemy, are also employed. Their power may be derived from the supernatural beings. Some of the charms are worn as a necklace, or bracelet.

There are various types of charms. For example there are personal charms to aid the owner in economic pursuits (e.g. trading) or personal protection. Such charms may be made by mixing shea butter with the necessary magical ingredients, the mixture being placed in a small brass vessel and often embellished with cowrie shells and needles. Such charms are often referred to as *aduru* or medicine.

There is also the practice of evil magic which can be used to cause death or illness. Such practices vary widely including imitative or homeopathic magic. An opponent may be killed or injured by passing him or her a drink while holding a magical mixture in the same hand, so that its power permeates the glass. Burying or hiding an *asuman* is a common practice. Many wear protective charms to protect themselves with magic.

The Akan Notion of Death

Among the Akans there is a firm belief in the reality of life after death. Life does not end at the grave, rather there is a spiritual dimension of life beyond the grave. The souls of the departed, once separated from the body have accomplished their earthly destiny, but they remain in the place God assigns them. The Fantes call this place of residence *samanadze*.

Belief in Ancestors

The basis of the relationship between Akans and their ancestors stems from their belief in life after death. Akans believe that the kinship relationship is not broken by death. As Sarpong (1974:41) affirms kinship ties continue after death.¹²

The Akan belief in *nsamanfo* (ancestral spirits) provide the sanctions for the basic unit in the social structure, the *ebusua* or matrilineal clan. Each *ebusua* has an *akongua* (ancestral stool) which is kept in a special room in the family house. The spirits of the *nsamanfo* (ancestors) are believed to inhabit the stool. The stool room is a sacred place and not every person can enter in. Special annual ceremonies are observed for the ancestral stool during which offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestors. Notable among these ceremonies are: *ahobaa* and *egvadoto*.¹³

The ancestors occupy a special spiritual world, yet they stand in a particularly close relationship with the tribe or the family which derives its life

from them, and so they are still part of the community. They form more or less a "cloud of witnesses" watching over the activities of the living members of the lineage. Mbiti calls them "living dead."

The ancestors are supposed to be the real owners of the land. Busia (1951:67) records the case of an elder who was called by his ancestors to answer questions over the sale of some family land. The ancestors are also believed to possess power to bless or punish the living. For this reason Akans would like to maintain good relationships with them and avoid their displeasure. It must be remembered however, that the sphere of influence of the ancestors is not thought to extend beyond their family or clan group. Family members may appeal to the ancestors for good health, and prosperity. They may also request their assistance in time of difficulty.

It is clear that the ancestors are treated with awe, fear, reverence, and respect. The vexing question has been whether they are worshipped or simply revered. Sarpong rejects the notion that the ancestors are worshipped and affirms that they are merely venerated. He writes:

The Ghanaian does not worship his ancestor as Christians worship God or Moslems Allah. He venerates them, honors them and respects them, and this deferential attitude occupies a big part of his religious life. As an individual the Ghanaian serves his ancestors privately as well as he can. He remembers them often. When in need or in difficulty, he calls upon them to come to his aid. (1974:42)

I find it difficult to accept Sarpong's position because when Akans engage in practices concerning the ancestors such as in the pouring of libations, it is hard to affirm that they are merely venerating them. Judging

from the responses of many Akans I interviewed, it appears that when Akans engage in practices connected with ancestors it goes far beyond mere remembrance. As spiritual entities they are believed to have power to bless or punish. Ancestors are petitioned by many Akans when they pour libation to them. The problem with the ancestor cult is that it appears to raise the ancestors to the status of god to whom petitions and prayers are actually directed instead of to God.

Our position is that, while in reality the ancestor practices are in recognition of the essential unity of all the members of the *ebusua* or the clan, in practice, such as when libation is made to them, they are held to possess superhuman powers to whom people can appeal for help. This represents more than veneration, in spite of what Sarpong will have us believe. It seems to me that as a Catholic Bishop, Sarpong, is relating the Akan practice to that in the Catholic Church where prayers are made to God through Mary.

It must also be stressed that death does not qualify anyone to be an ancestor. It is only those who die what the Akan regards as a good death, have lived a good life, and have attained the mature age of forty. Thus in libation prayer certain names are not mentioned particularly, persons who died through accidents and those known to have lived immoral lives.

The Akan belief in ancestors as well noted by Lystad (1968:161) is a philosophical, religious affirmation of the unity between the present world of

living men and the invisible, historic past which continues to exert its influence upon present events.

Akan Concept of Human Personality

Humans are an enigma, and are the most difficult beings to know and understand next to God. In the words of Sarpong "man has been able to split the atom; but he has not yet been able to penetrate into himself. Man has reached the moon; but he remains a mystery to himself" (1977:58).

Psychologists, philosophers, and theologians, have all given their impressions of this enigmatic being we call human, but none has been able to propound a theory of humanity that is satisfactory to all, no matter how lucid. Again different cultures have different conceptions of humans.

The general view held about humans in Africa is that they do not have a split personality but are an organic whole. All parts of the human personality—the body, the soul, and the spirit, etc.—the concepts and description of which differ from place to place form a unity which responds together to the source of its being. It could be validly asserted that in many African societies human beings are believed to owe their origin to God (Supreme Being) who is also the determiner of their destiny.

Akans believe that every human being has *okra*, the part of God within which makes a person a living human being. The *okra* links every person directly to God and it has a pre-existence as well as a post-earthly existence.

The *okra* is the undying part of humans. It is distinct from the body, and it is that which gives life to the body; without its presence the body is lifeless. The *okra* is believed to be the guiding spirit of the individual and determines the person's destiny in life, departs from the body at death, and goes back to its source.

Bame (1991:120-12) affirms that in Akan belief there are two basic elements of human personality, namely, a male—transmitted spirit *ntoro*, and a female transmitted blood *mogya* received from the other. The Fantes call it *egyabosom*, literally the father's deity.¹⁴ *Egyabosom*, being a male-transmitted element, goes through the male line of descent. A daughter receives her father's *egyabosom* but does not transmit it to her children; instead she transmits blood to them. The *ntoro* or *egyabosom* automatically assigns every Akan to an *ntoro* group, a patrilineal exogamous division, members of which, when necessary perform certain rituals and observe the same totemic taboos and practices. The *mogya* (blood), on the other hand, gives all Akans their lineage (*ebusua*) and endows them with status, identity and rights of inheritance.

The other spiritual component of a person, the *sunsum* (spirit), gives a person a distinctive personality and character which is either strong or weak. It emanates from the *egyabosom* or *ntoro*. Bame (1991:120) compares this to Freud's ego and superego, controlling a person's morality as well as protecting him against misfortune. Unlike the *okra*, *sunsum* dies with a person.

The Akan concept of human personality clearly explains the meaning which they attach to life. Life is constant and is not the opposite of death, because the *okra* survives death and continues to live. Thus the Akan have a saying that *onyimpa wu an nna onwui*—though a person may die he or she continues to live on. This is the basis of the importance the Akans attach to the ancestors. They maintain a relationship with their ancestors because those relatives continue to live on after their death. In the words of Kofi Opoku, "The dead do not just fade into nothingness; on the contrary, they retain their identity and continue to hold the social, political and religious status which they held while they lived in this world" (1988:23). The belief in life after death is also the basis of elaborate funeral rites and ceremonies observed by the Akans.

The Akans also believe that there are two worlds, the physical world and the spirit world (*samanadze*), which have close links, manifested by the fact that through birth and death there is a constant circulation of beings and spirits between them. It is the Akan belief that a child born in the physical world also belongs to a ghost mother who is bereaved in the spirit world because she has lost a child to the physical world. The child may also emanate from a spirit being (*abosomba*). The evidence of this is that certain children are born with some marks already on them.

In the light of this belief the Akans do not regard a newly-born baby as settled in this physical world until it has lived for about eight days or more.

They believe that it may have temporarily left its ghost-mother to pay a brief visit to this world with plans to return to the spirit world through death. In some cases it is believed that the child in the spirit world was sent by the mother and refused to go, and therefore ran into the physical world through birth. Some even believe that God has ceased creating humans; therefore, it is those who die that come back. When the child has lived for a period of eight days or more it can safely be regarded as having "come to stay."

Reincarnation

The return of the dead, or some part of their life force, to their family is held among the Akans and many other African societies, though there are many differences about the degree and manner in which this takes place. Thus there is a possibility of dead persons being reborn. Circumstantial stories abound about babies who had the same physical characteristics or deformations as their predecessors which give affirmation to this Akan belief.¹⁵ There are several Akan names like *Ababio* and *Donkor*, which suggest the return of a person.

According to Parrinder the record of African slave communities, carried over from Africa through the nefarious slave trade, shows that the belief in reincarnation prevailed among them. Parrinder writes that:

The records of slaves in the eighteenth century show a high proportion of suicides, partly from despair but also it is said with hope of being reborn in their native land. Because of this their

owners cut off the heads of suicide slaves to suggest that they would be reborn mutilated. (1969:65)

Akan Traditional Religious Practices

The Akan interpretation of the universe is shown in traditional ritual observances. Traditional religious practices are therefore the product of Akan perception, encounter, reflection upon, and experiences of the universe in which they live. The Akan perceives the world as a living equilibrium that is under constant threat by diseases, sorcery, witchcraft and other anti-social forces. Each society has a way of explaining and dealing with these disruptive social forces. While Western societies tend to lean towards scientific and philosophical means of coping with these problems, to the Akan these cosmic forces and social calamities can often be controlled and manipulated through traditional practices. As Adeyemo correctly affirms:

The **warding off** of these cosmic and social evils (or stated positively, maintaining ritual equilibrium) becomes the central focus of religious activities and their salvation. Those who can wield powers in the society such as witchdoctors, herbalist and ancestors, are regarded as "saviours". (1989:222)

Rituals and ceremonies are the means by which Akans express their beliefs. Through the performance of traditional rites such as sacrifices, libation, and offerings they can seek the advice, and solicit the blessing of the gods and ancestors. Rites are also performed during critical or crisis moments. In such moments some would readily consult diviners, medicine men, and other religious figures believed to have personal contact with the supernatural.

Sacrifices and Offerings

Sacrifices and offerings play a major role in Akan traditional religion. Sacrifices are performed for various purposes, such as warding off evil, securing the favor and protection of ancestors, appeasing divinities, and other supernatural beings, and expressing gratitude for such blessings as plentiful harvest, the gift of children, the safe delivery of babies, deliverance from natural calamities, and other life experiences. Sacrifices are also made to the gods and ancestors when they have been offended.

The practice of libation. The practice of libation in the Akan traditional religion has attracted much debate (Asante-Antwi 1990). The debate has sometimes focused on whether libation and sacrifice are made as a form of worship or veneration particularly with regard to the ancestors. Libation is basically a traditional form of prayer in which some kind of liquid, in most cases alcoholic drink, is poured on the ground accompanied by complex and sometimes unintelligible language.

It is a common practice to pour libation during state functions, family gatherings, and funeral observances. In libation prayers the ancestors and gods are named and invited to take a drink. These are the grounds for many objections by Christians who will argue that the content of the prayers in the libation are to ancestors and not to God. Asante-Antwi has noted the six structural components in a libation text:

1. Opening words or sentences: this takes the form of (a) invocation/invitation either by a priest, an elder or *okyeame* [herald or spokesperson] (b) a response by the devotee, participants.
2. Welcome address to the invited ancestral spirits
3. Supreme Being or *Nyame* is addressed.
4. Various deities are also invoked and supplicated.
5. Religious and secular (civil) authorities are also invoked and supplicated. As a problem solving device the words or text deal with the question of health, wealth, prosperity, procreation, peace, protection, and thanksgiving.
6. Closing sentences or words. (1990:7-8)

Some scholars like Asante-Antwi have argued that this traditional form of prayer can be adopted into Christian practice but such views have received strong resistance from some sections of the Christian community. For example Rev. De Graft Johnson, a past Chairman of Kumasi District of the Methodist Church, in an interview affirmed that the practice must be rejected because it contradicts Christian beliefs. He quoted Hosea 9:4 "They will not pour out libations of wine to the Lord" to support his position.¹⁶

Life Cycle Rites

Comparing a life cycle in a number of societies, the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep noted in his classic work *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) that most societies have rituals marking the transition of an individual or a group of individuals from one important status to another. He termed these transitional rituals "rites of passage."

The Akans regard life as a religious journey.

The various stages of the life cycle from the cradle to the grave are marked by rituals to ensure a smooth transition from one stage to the next.

Initiation

Initiation rites mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. In these rites the young are educated in matters of sex, marriage, procreation, family life, and the responsibility of adulthood. Puberty rites for girls include the preparation of a local meal known as *oto* consisting of boiled yam, mashed and mixed with palm oil and eggs. The girl is given some to eat and some of it is also taken to the stream by the members of the family, who call the local gods, and announce to them that the child has reached a marriageable age.

The girl is adorned with fine jewelry and made to wear a silk cloth which extends from the waist to the ankle. She is paraded throughout the streets accompanied by young people of her own sex sometimes singing a song in honor of her maidenhood. This practice is often seen as way of advertising that the girl has reached a marriageable age and any suitor could come forward. Generally, it is a taboo to become pregnant before the performance of the puberty rites.

The purpose of puberty rites is to safeguard the moral conduct of the girl up to that age, to declare her new status in society as a potential wife and mother, and to pray for her fertility. It is often quickly followed by marriage.

Unlike some African societies the Akan boy enters puberty much more quietly. Unlike his female counterparts no special ceremonies are observed. Our findings are confirmed by Lystad (1968:56) who argues that "adulthood depends less upon biological maturity; no public ceremony is observed to honor its arrival." My own impression is that boys are circumcised at the age of twelve and over. This was done by medicine men called *wanzam* without the use of any anesthetics. This might be taken as a male puberty rite because it was a sign that the boy has reached adulthood.¹⁷

Marriage

The Akan attitude towards procreation makes marriage an important institution. It is considered a tragedy when a person is not able to reproduce offspring. Marriage is not a union of, nor a contract between, two individuals; it is rather a union between two families, an alliance between two kinship groups. As Lystad has observed of the Ashantis "because a marriage binds two large families closely together it is not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in fear of the social consequences of an ill-conceived union" (1968:59).

Before marriage is contracted, each of the two families investigate the background of the boy and the girl. The purpose of such investigation is to ensure that the couple is fit to marry. Both families undertake background investigations to find out the age, kinship group, and character of the couple.

They also ensure that the partner is from a family free from insanity, hereditary diseases, or any criminal trait. Only when the results of the investigation prove satisfactory does the family agree to the marriage.

A traditional marriage ceremony is thereby arranged with both families and other friends present. Even when the couples are Christians they must necessarily go through this ceremony before any marriage ceremony can be performed in the church. The crucial part of the ceremony involves giving of a small sum of money (bride wealth), and various gifts including alcoholic drinks by the family of the groom to that of the bride. When these presentations have been made, the couple becomes customarily married. The second phase of the marriage rite is known as *ehyiadze* where the groom presents other gifts, including clothing, to the bride. Sometimes these gifts are presented with great pomp, by means of a long train of women carrying the items on their heads through the streets of the village.

The actual marriage ceremony, *ayerhia*, involves the meeting of friends and relatives of both partners in the house of the groom. Here the bride is escorted by her friends and the sister of the groom. The ceremony involves placing the bride three times on the knees of the groom, and touching their foreheads three times. An important part of the ceremony is the pouring of libation to the ancestors to ask for their blessings on the marriage and especially that the couple will be reproductive and replenish the family.

We may divert here and note that Akans place great premium on children. Childlessness and sterility are considered a personal tragedy. Failure to have children can be grounds for divorce. Because the Akans view sterility with such horror, in all libation prayers, a request for numerous children is never omitted. Prolific child-bearing is therefore an honor. It also ensures that one's family will not become extinct—something which the Akan dread. There is a ceremony to honor the mother who bears ten children. It is called *baduguan* where a sheep is slaughtered for her and a great feast held in recognition for her achievements. The woman's family also shower gifts on the husband for adding more to their family.¹⁸

Drinking, feasting and dancing follow the marriage ceremony, after which the crowd disperses. According to an informant, it was the practice that the following morning, if the groom had found the bride to be a virgin, he would send a full bottle of drink tied in a white cloth to the parents of the bride; If he found her not to be one, he should send a half-bottle in black cloth.

Going through the traditional marriage ceremony is a necessary requirement. All the members of the church I interviewed indicated that they went through the traditional process.¹⁹ According to some of my informants they presented money where the ceremony required the presentation of drink because of the church's stand against drinking.

Among the Fantes, there are several types of marriages, each of which is regarded as distinct because of the status of one of the partners, or the method

involved. This include *Ayetsew* a form of sorarate marriage where a deceased wife or betrothed is replaced by a sister or *kuna awar*; the heir inherits the widow of the deceased.²⁰ It is important to note also that polygyny or the practice whereby a man can take an additional wife or wives is an acceptable traditional practice.

Birth Ceremonies

The Akan welcomes the arrival of a new baby with joy because to be childless is socially disastrous or unacceptable. In spite of the joy of being pregnant which many women pray for, pregnancy and child birth are also regarded as warfare or crisis moments because they are known to result in death. It is believed that during these moments that the nefarious activities of witches are intensified, working to cause havoc on their helpless victims.

The pregnant woman may protect herself from witches, sorcerers and other evil powers harming her or her child by recourse to traditional medicine men or priest healers. When the baby is finally born the naval cord is cut and ritually buried. The baby is bathed several times with specially prepared water. This is done to prevent the baby from having an indelible odor.

After childbirth the mother is considered to be unclean until after the seventh day. It used to be the custom that during the seven days the woman would not touch anything since anything she touched would become unclean. I would like to digress and say that women having their menstrual period are

considered in the same way to be ritually unclean and may not participate in any ritual activity. Some of the women in the church following this tradition will even not feel comfortable to come to church or participate in communion service.

At the expiration of the seven days, she may occupy herself with ordinary household duties but she may not go about the town or visit friends, until three months have elapsed. Many women still keep this tradition and keep away from their duties until after three months. Christians even refrain from coming to church until the three months have elapsed.

At the end of the three months, she puts on her best clothes and pays a visit to friends and neighbors accompanied by other friends and relatives. The purpose of this outing is to give thanks to the ancestors and gods for her safe delivery, along with all who have been of special help to her.

Members of the church, go to church at the end of the third month to give special thanks to God. A thanksgiving offering is given and prayers are said for the mother and the baby.

Naming ceremony. If a child survives to the eighth day, it is believed to have come to stay. A ceremony is observed on this day to give the baby a name, the traditional way of welcoming the child formally into the family and the world. When children are born they are regarded as *ohoho* (stranger). It is therefore necessary that the baby be given a formal welcome. The traditional

way of achieving this is through the naming ceremony or *dzin to*, which is a means of admitting the child into the society.

The first name given to a child would be determined by the day of the week on which it was born. For example, a male born on Sunday (*Kwesida*) will go by *Kwesi*, and if a girl, *Esi*. At the naming ceremony the child's second name is given. The second name is generally that of a significant person or a dead relative.

The officiant for the naming ceremony is usually the paternal grandfather, or any male member of the father's family. The ceremony must take place in the early hours of the morning between six and seven o'clock.

On the day of the ceremony, there is a gathering of the members of the extended family and other invited friends and well-wishers. The father presents food, toilet materials, such as a bucket, soap, towels, and two fowls - one male and one female. Some add a gold ring. The gifts are all meant to welcome the child as *ohoho* (stranger).

The ceremony begins with the pouring of libation by the paternal grandfather or the person appointed to officiate. Taking the child in his arms he asks the father to name the child. After this two containers, one containing water and the other containing liquor, are brought. Three leaves from the *odwon* tree are placed in the container of water.

The officiant will call the crowd to order saying *egyie ee!* and the people will respond *yiee!* He then dips his finger into the liquor, letting a drop or two

fall into the mouth of the child, and repeating the following words: *osimesi wose nsa a nsa* (when you say it is wine it should be wine). The process is repeated three times. The third time, the name of the elder after whom the child is being named is also called. The officiant repeats the process this time using the water with the words *osimesi wose nsu a nsu a* (when you say it is water it should be water). The purpose of this is to impress the soul of the child with the necessity of being honest and truthful. According to Christensen, the lips are touched three times, for as the proverbs states, "when you rest your cooking pot on three stones, it never falls over" (1954:85). This part of the ceremony being over, the parents, particularly the woman, are advised to take good care of the child and to treat it with respect. Tradition has it that when a child named after an elder is insulted it amounts to insulting the person after whom the child named.

The next part of the ceremony is merry making. Food and drinks are served to all present. At this point those wishing to make any present to the child may do so as a means of welcoming the child. The person for whom the child is named, if alive, will offer a gift to the child for the special honor done him or her.

Death and Funeral Ceremonies

Akan ceremonies concerning death are very elaborate, and by far the one traditional practice that has resisted change the most. The lively

persistence of ritual practices connected with the dead reflects Akan beliefs about the afterlife, and their reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to affect the living.

The event of a death sparks off a series of ritual activities. These rituals are intended to ensure that dead persons leave this world with full ceremony as they join the ancestors. Consequently, mourning of the death takes the form of elaborate, expensive, and time consuming ceremonies. One would not be far from wrong in saying that the Akans take better care of persons when they die than they do when they are alive. Large sums of money are spent in the performance of these funeral ceremonies.

The funeral has two main aspects *fundaho* and *eyiye*. The latter is observed at any time from a week to a year or more after the burial. Apart from the two main rituals there are other minor ritual performances; the third day observance—*adzekyeenyin*, the eighth day celebration—*ndaawotwe*, the fortieth day celebration—*adaduanan*, and the first anniversary—*afrenhyia*. All these celebrations are marked by ritual performances and the gathering of family members and loved ones. On the day before the burial, the corpse is washed and dressed in its best. Before that the *ebusuapanyin*--the family head, pours libation. The body is then laid in state.

When this has been done, there is the firing of a gun to announce that the funeral has begun. Mourning and wailing then begin by the family members, friends and sympathizers. A wakekeeping is observed during which

time mourners file past the body as the women continue their wailing, calling out the praises of the dead person, extolling the person's virtues, and sometimes reproaching him or her for deserting them and leaving them orphans. The night is spent in drinking, drumming, dancing, and conversation. This is said to provide an outlet for the people's feelings of grief, to express their gratitude for the person's life, and give credit for his or her achievements. If the person is a church member, the church members come to sing at the wake-keeping to comfort the bereaved family.

The children and the family members wear traditional mourning clothes and sometimes stripes of red clay on their arms and foreheads to indicate that they are mourning the death of a family member. Close members of the family of the deceased and his wife are expected to sit near the body, wailing loudly. It used to be the practice that close relatives of the family would shave their heads as a sign of mourning; but this practice is no longer observed. People pay money now to avoid the shaving of their heads.

The funeral continues the following day. Before the body is placed in the coffin the *ebusuapanyin* again has to pour libation. It was customary to bury the dead with tools or weapons they used in life, and fine robes and ornaments. But the latter are now generally removed before burial.²¹ The body is placed in the coffin along with other items that it is believed the deceased will require in the next world. These include money which is tied in the cloth for food and the "crossing of the river"²² During the interment, the

relatives address the deceased as though they were speaking to a living relative departing on a journey.

The Akan funeral observance has both a latent and manifest function. It appears that the elaborate ceremonies are meant not only to mourn the dead, but some of them are meant indirectly to seek honor and prestige for members of the kinship group including the dead relative. The wish of every Akan is to have a good funeral when this life is over. Traditional practices concerning death are by far one of the most significant Akan cultural practices that have resisted change.²³

Akans attach much importance to the way their funeral or the funeral of a family member is observed. If a funeral is not properly observed, it becomes a disgrace not only to the dead person but also to the members of the family. It is therefore the duty of the family to give a fitting burial and a deserving funeral. As Sarpong succinctly affirms:

Funerals are regarded as a duty, and no pains may be spared to make them memorable. The kinds of questions that are asked after a funeral are "How was the attendance?" "Was it exciting?" Funerals must be successful and the answers to those questions are a pointer to their success or failure. (1974:26)

One important belief connected with funeral ceremonies is the belief that the spirit of the deceased is present and observing all that is happening. Thus people address the dead body as if the person were not dead. Several of my informants made statements that affirm this belief. According to one informant, while she was washing a body, the corpse would not allow her to

hold its hand, and its face appeared very sullen. The family elder had to be called in to pour libation, after which the body became more relaxed.

Another informant told me that while washing the corpse she saw tears flowing from the face of the dead person. In all these instances the family head had to be called in to speak to the dead person through the pouring of libation before they could proceed with preparing the body to be laid in state. All these stories demonstrate the Akan belief that the dead are not just dead, their spirits are hovering around especially at their funeral.

One important rite that is performed before a sick person breathes his or her last breath is for a family member to pour a little water through the sick person's throat. This last rite of giving water to a kinsmen before they slip away is considered so important that its omission at the death of a relative is deeply regretted. Bame (1991:121) affirms that to make sure this rite is performed, Ashanti elders always like to have a blood relative with them at the death bed so that this rite will be performed if they are dying. The importance of this rite is found in the saying that "He who has no blood relative dies thirsty." They believe that the spirit of the newly-dead person is about to embark on its journey to the spirit world, and like a living person, it should not commence the journey thirsty.

Before the corpse is laid in the coffin the *ebusuapanyin* (family head) has to pour libation. Besides the corpse some items like money, cloths, and some of the deceased's clothing are placed in the coffin. It is believed that the

deceased will need them for the next world. After these traditional rites the dead body is sent to the church for the burial service, if the deceased is a Christian, otherwise it is taken straight to the cemetery for burial.

What Rattray (1927:27) reports about the traditional burial is still true today; the coffin is placed on the ground, the head of the deceased's family steps forward, holding in either hand a branch of *summe* (the branch of a leaf) touching the coffin with each branch alternately, he says: *osimesi me pae wo kra ne yen ntem* (So-and-so, I separate your soul from us). One of the branches is laid upon the coffin and is buried with it; the other is placed at the head of the sleeping-place of the person who performs the rite. This rite is sometimes carried out also by the spouse, and by the brothers' sons.

A funeral celebration is usually an occasion for drunkenness and debauchery and many people including church members get caught up in it. Family members are expected to provide drinks for those who come to mourn with them. Funeral ceremonies also depend on the status of the deceased. If the person is a traditional office holder such as a chief, the ceremony is much more elaborate. The death of a chief is not immediately announced. It is concealed from the public for some time. It is the practice among the Akans not to say that a chief has died. They will say that *nana ko ekura* which literally means that the chief has gone to his village. During the funeral ceremony for chiefs or traditional rulers animals are sacrificed and any strayed animals found in the streets are killed. It used to be the practice that human

sacrifices were made and buried with the chief in the belief that the chief would need the help of these servants in the next life. The government has made such sacrifices illegal.

As I have already pointed out, the rationale underlying a whole array of Akan funeral rites and ceremonies is found in the beliefs Akans hold about the dead. These range from belief in the power of the dead person's spirit to belief in life after death. This fact has also been noted by

Kwabena Bame:

The ceremonies are performed to placate or appease the dead person's soul or spirit so that it does not do any harm to the living relatives. They are also performed to send away quickly a spirit which has power to do evil to the living. (1991:149)

Widowhood Rituals (*kunaye*)

Our discussion on funeral rites will not be complete without mentioning the part taken by widows or *kunafo*. It is the belief among the Akans that a person who loses a spouse enters into a state of uncleanness and must undergo a kind of ritual cleansing. Again the matrimonial contract into which they had entered on marriage is not entirely dissolved. The *kunafo* or widow/widower must therefore perform some customary rites aimed at severing the broken relationship from the deceased spouse. Thus the death of one spouse sets in motion a whole series of ritual observances.

Although both men and women go through this ritual, it is the women who go through a more elaborate ritual. This point is noted by Elizabeth

Amoah (1990:93) when she affirms that there are no corresponding strict restrictions laid upon the man. There is a greater degree of freedom from customary prohibitions for men than for women. Thus, for instance, the period of ritual confinement prescribed for surviving widowers tends to be considerably shorter, whereas for widows the situation is considerably different. It usually lasts a year.

The practice of widowhood rituals vary among various Akan groups, but there are some general features common to all widowhood rites. The following are some of the common features found in customary practices observed by widows.

She must be dressed in traditional black mourning cloth and sit beside the dead body while it is laid in state. While the body of the deceased is being taken to the cemetery for burial the woman carries a pot known as *kuna kukuo* and leads the way. At a point along the way to the cemetery, the widow would turn about and allow the pot to fall backwards off the head, breaking into fragments and scattering its three stones and other contents. In this pot are placed three stones and some leaves (*emme* and *nunum*). The widow will run back to the town without once looking backward. On returning home she washes herself with sea water or she is taken to the river or sea to bathe.²⁴

The widow is also required to sleep in the room where the deceased was laid in state with other elderly women from the man's family member for at least a period of one week. It used to be a period of three months. She

sleeps with the man's cloth. She is not supposed to talk with any one in the morning until she has had her bath. During this period the *ebusua* or family of the late husband are supposed to provide for her needs.

The widow is required to wear around her waist a girdle of fiber from which is hung a key or sometimes a locked padlock. This is intended to prevent the ghost of the deceased spouse from coming to have sexual relations with her which is considered to be a very bad omen. By the same token the woman is forbidden to have any sexual relationship with any man at least for a period of one year. It is believed that if the woman breaks this rule of celibacy within the year, the ghost of the deceased husband will have sexual intercourse with the woman. This will result in the woman being plagued by sickness, death or becoming barren for life. It is also believed that no man would be able to have sex with the woman. The widows indeed live in constant fear of such an occurrence. Some of my informants who have gone through these rites before confessed that they have to do it because of such fears.

According to several of my informants the widow must have sexual intercourse with some man, especially someone she is not likely to meet again. It is believed this will prevent any harassment by the spirit of the dead husband. This information is also affirmed by Christensen:

The only incident of sanctioned extra-marital sexual relations occurs following the death of a husband, when a widow, before remarriage, should have a sexual intercourse with a stranger, or someone not aware of her status as a widow. It is believed this

will cleanse her of the spirit of the dead husband. No harm will come to the stranger involved, for he is not told about her widowhood. (1954:74)

During this time the widows become the object of insinuations and harsh treatment by inlaws who often suspect them of being the cause of the death. Their lot, even apart from the loss of their mate, is not particularly happy. According to an informant some of those harsh treatments are designed to rid the widow of any *mbusu* (ill fate). But in many cases this is the result of a feeling of vengeance on the part of the husband's relatives which they have been harboring for a very long time. The passing away of the husband therefore provides an opportunity to vent their feelings by their insisting on the performance to the letter of every aspect of the widowhood rite especially where it is suspected that the wife was the cause of the death.

After the burial of the husband the woman remains in seclusion for three months, being attended by an old woman who has gone through the ritual before. During this time the widow is considered unclean. After three months is over the widow must give away all the clothes she has been using during her confinement in the house. It is given usually to the old lady who attended to her or to an old lady who has also been a widow before.

The period of widowhood ends after one year of the death of the husband which is the final day of the funeral. In this case the woman has to go through another ritual called *kuna gu*. At midnight before the final day of the funeral the widow carries a pot of fire to the edge of the town, or, if it is a

coastal town, to the sea. She is led by some elderly women, who keep shouting *wonnhyia, wonnhyia* which is a warning to people not to pass that way, for it is believed that the spirit of the husband is following.

On reaching the seaside she is made to throw the pot into the sea or to the ground as the case may be. This is supposed to induce the spirit to leave her. She then washes herself in the sea three times and returns home. On her return she is not required to look back.

If the woman lives in an inland town, she must travel to the ocean for ablutions, as no water is believed to possess the cleansing power of the sea, for it is the residence of Bosompo, the god of the sea, and a powerful deity. It is only after this final rite that the woman could remarry. However the man whom the widow eventually marries must perform some customary rites before he can take the woman to be his wife. Her new spouse must sacrifice a sheep to the dead husband as *ayerfar* (adultery fee). It is believed that the widowhood rite is necessary for the widows to get rid of the *sesa* (ghost) of the man. The usual expression is *po wo ho sesa*. Several people will perform it for fear that the ghost of the spouse might cause some harm to them.

I did not encounter in my field work any instance where failure to perform the rites had caused any known harm. But an informant narrated to me a case of a woman who refused to observe the rite of giving out her old clothes to someone. This woman experienced a lot of problems and later fell on the street and died while she was going to draw water from a stream.

People attributed her lot to the failure to perform all the traditional rites associated with widowhood. Another informant, an elderly woman, also cited two instances where a woman is believed to have been "spoiled" by her late husband because she did not go through the rite. She was however quick to point out that demonic influences may also be at work in such instances.

The unfair treatment meted out to widows has prompted the Government of Ghana to publish an Act on Widowhood Rituals, Criminal Code (Amendment) Law 1984 (P.N.D.C. Law 90) which reads as follows:

1. Whoever compels a bereaved spouse or a relative of such spouse to undergo any custom or practice that is cruel in nature shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.
2. For the purpose of sub-section (1) of this Section, a custom or practice shall be deemed to be cruel in nature if it constitutes an assault within the meaning of Section 85, 86, 87, 88 of this Act.

Section 278A: Whoever compels a bereaved spouse or a relative of such spouse to undergo any custom or practice that is immoral or grossly indecent in nature, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

This ritual is very persistent among many church members even though the church has made attempts to prevent members from going through these rites. Again the practice has also continued in spite of government attempts to prohibit it through legislation. Widowhood rites have undergone some changes as with most customary practices due to the influence of Christianity and Western culture, but nevertheless they have persisted among many Akans

today, and church members are no exception. According to my informants many undergo this customary practice for fear that the ghost of the deceased husband will cause some harm. Some engage in it as a kind of respect for the husband.

Traditional Festivals

Apart from the family rituals there are other traditional festivals which involve the whole community. As Busia has correctly attested:

There are seasonal occasions when in addition to offerings and prayers to the ancestors, there are elaborate ceremonies involving rites of purification, drumming, dancing, singing, of the recital of tribal history and the reaffirmation of the values, the tribe shares and cherishes. (1962:15)

These seasonal and elaborate ceremonies involving entire communities constitute what is popularly known as traditional festivals. The celebration of traditional festivals continues to be a major feature in many Akan societies. During such occasions many Akans travel to their home towns to participate in those festivals. Among the Fantes each state or traditional area has its own festival. Some of these festivals are *Akwambo*, *Aboakyer*, *Afahye*, *Bakatue* etc. These may all be regarded as commemorative festivals.

The celebration of these traditional festivals involves a communication with the lesser gods and the spirits of the ancestors by means of libation, prayers and sacrifices. The traditional festivals comprise both religious and recreational aspects. The religious aspects are the rites and rituals, which are

more or less community-cleansing ceremonies, intended to supplicate the gods and the ancestral spirits for the groups' well being. On the other hand are the recreational aspects, comprising singing, dancing, and general merry-making. All members of a community are expected to, and often do, take part in them either by actively singing and dancing or by watching as interested observers.

Beliefs and Practices Related to Illness and Healing

African traditional healing practices continue to be popular among the people. Many Africans regularly use Western medicine, but along with this, many will also make use of traditional healing methods. In this section we discuss Akan beliefs and practices related to illness and healing.

Traditional Medical Practices

The practice of traditional medicine is as old as the country. It has been practiced by every traditional society of West Africa. According to Patrick Twumasi, a Ghanaian medical sociologist, traditional medicine refers to "a practice in which there is no conceptual separation between natural and supernatural entities" (1988:6). A sine qua non of traditional medicine is the utilization of magico-religious acts and concepts.

Traditional medicine has played and still plays an important role in Akan society. Traditional medical practitioners use a holistic approach in

dealing with health and illness issues. They use herbs and base their methods on the social, cultural and religious background of the people.

In traditional Akan society ill-health is generally traced to the activity of supernatural beings, displeased gods or ancestors, and other lesser spirits. It could also be the work of a sorcerer, or a witch. The function of traditional medical practitioners, some of whom are religious specialists is to diagnose illness and to prescribe cures using herbal and plant medicine or supernatural treatments where necessary.

It must also be noted that traditional medicine does not rely solely upon the supernatural for an explanation. It features a stock of remedies which treat ills and some have scientific validity. For example, herbs are prescribed, wounds are bandaged and broken bones set and bound; stimulants and sedatives are also found in the traditional pharmacopeia. Many such simple treatments, especially for those injuries rather than for illnesses, are considered simply treatments, without any supernatural properties attributed to them. We must say however, that most treatments, are regarded as aspects of a total healing which does include supernatural ingredients.

Because of the general notion Akans have about causes of illness some practitioners have taken advantage of the beliefs of the people and attached supernatural means to their cure/operation when an obvious natural cure was available. They try to find a supernatural cause when there is no such cause.

Dr. Evans-Anfom, a renowned Ghanaian medical officer, aptly has made the following observation about traditional and modern or Western medicine:

In contrast with the modern medical practitioner who approaches the diagnosis of illness in a systematic manner: history, observation and physical examination supplemented by appropriate laboratory or tests, e.g. X-rays, the approach of the traditional practitioner appears unco-ordinated. Not only is his examination usually perfunctory but his implements are rudimentary and his methods tend to be obscure. (1986:16)

In the traditional system many varieties of practitioners are found, including, bonesetters, and midwives. There are the herbalists who, in addition to the straight forward practice of herbalism, also deal with supernatural causes of disease. They are consulted particularly when a certain sickness is regarded as *sunsum mu yareba* or a spiritual disease. Westerners have tended to describe traditional medical practitioners as "witch-doctors."

The introduction of Western medicine and current socio-cultural changes in the Akan society have been exerting some influence on the practice of traditional medicine, nevertheless, the traditional practice continues to be used by many Akans. What Lystad observed as far back as 1968 is still true today:

Most Ashanti, furthermore, see no reason why scientific methods need completely supplant the traditional methods. The worth of the new methods is judged not in terms of the complex theory which underlies them but in terms of how well they work. Both the new and the old practices appear to be effective in their own ways; both provide their own satisfaction. (1968:95)

In the face of cultural changes, many of the practitioners are modifying their methods, in co-operation with Center for Scientific Research into Plant

Medicine at Mampong set up by the government. The center encourages the practice of traditional medicine in line with modern medical practices such as the use of laboratory and medical instruments. One would only hope that a rational convergence between medicine and western medicine would be achieved.

Summary and Conclusion

We conclude this section by asking what bearing all this information on Akan traditional beliefs and practices has on mission among the Akans? Our discussion of Akan traditional religion raises some missiological questions. For example, what can Christianity affirm or build upon? Religiously speaking, no cultural system is a *tabular rasa*, and this is true also of the Akans. It must be expected that a people's response to any new religion will essentially be determined and conditioned by their old religious system which has shaped their character and values.

In a sense the traditional religion has been a preparation for the coming of Christianity. Certain aspects of belief system such as belief in the creator God, was a fertile ground for the seed of the gospel to take root and grow. For Christianity to make a lasting impact it must build upon the old religious values and present the new truth in the old idiom. This is in line with the old teaching principle of beginning with what is known and moving to the unknown.

From the outline of the Akan religious beliefs and practices given here, one can discern some positive as well as negative elements. In our opinion there is no culture which is free of sin in spite of some good elements that may be inherent in them. Our intention in discussing Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices is to give a panoramic view in order to discover some of the good elements that offer some fertile soil for the seed of the gospel to take root and grow among the Akans. Unfortunately some of these good elements have been neglected by Christianity.

Some of the positive aspects include: belief in *Nyame* or Supreme Being, spirits (good and evil), life-after-death as shown in the belief in ancestors and traditional medical practice. Again the Akan social structure, with a strong sense of *ebusua* or extended family base, is a wonderful asset Christianity can utilize to create a strong sense of community spirit and solidarity among the people of God. The Akans are also already in tune with the supernatural world, and their sense of the sacred provides rich potentials which can be used to build the spiritual lives of Akan Christians. Christianity can make use of some of these positive elements to consolidate the Christian faith among the Akans and thus help minimize the problem of split-level Christianity.

While there are many potential elements in the Akan religion that can enhance the Christian faith there are many negative aspects as well. Like every culture some of the Akan cultural elements are tainted with sin as well as the demonic and stand as obstacles to the Christian faith. Some of the

negative aspects of Akan traditional beliefs and practices include widowhood rites, charms and magic, and witchcraft. These beliefs and practices contribute to people living in constant fear and in bondage to evil spirits. They can be seen as really incompatible with the Christian faith. For example in the New Testament Christ is presented as a force which challenges all magical and occult practices (Acts 19:18-19).

We cannot therefore romantically glorify the Akan religion as is the manner of some people who have called for a return to the traditional religion and culture. As we noted earlier, there has been a tendency among some Ghanaians after independence from British colonial rule to call for a return to the traditional culture. This is partly in return rejection of Western culture imposed upon them, and also as a means of expressing their African identity.

In this chapter we have discussed the beliefs and practices of the Akans. We have therefore set the stage for the next chapter which deals with the introduction of Christianity by the Methodist missionaries and the missionaries attitudes to these beliefs. We have attempted in this chapter to explain that in Akan cosmology, the universe consists of two spheres; the physical and the spiritual. The physical comprises the visible, tangible, and concrete world of humans and other natural elements; while the spiritual consists of the invisible world of the gods, deities, ancestors, and the Supreme Being. The Akan perceive the two worlds as indivisible with one touching the other.

Alongside these beliefs are traditional practices which very much reflect the Akan perception and experiences of the cosmos in which they live. We also observe that Akan traditional religion is not a thing of the past; it effects the lives of many. As we shall learn later in this study, it still has influence in the lives of many members of the church. Traditional religion has been affected by various forces of change such as Christianity and Western culture. Even though no culture is static, nevertheless, many of the traditional practices, especially funeral rites are still observed among the Akan groups.

The tenacity of traditional religious beliefs has been a source of frustration to the church leaders who have accused members influenced by traditional practices of lacking faith. It will make sense to conclude that traditional religion has been a *praeparation evangelica*, or suitable material for gospel proclamation. Its theism offers fertile ground for the seed of the gospel to take root and grow.

End Notes

1. Akan religion is found in traditional wisdom and presuppositions which reveal more of their attitude towards the world and life. Attempts by scholars to put the Akan religion into systematic thought are much more recent. It is indeed a very difficult and complicated task.
2. The name of the seven ebusua or matrilineal clans and their totems are *Nsona* —Crow, *Twidan* —Leopard, *Kona* —Buffalow or bush cow, *Anona* —Parrot, *Aboradze* —Plantain or Lion, *Atwea* —Dog, and *Adwinadze* —Fish.
3. J.B. Christensen (1954) has discussed the historical background of the Fante States fully in Double Descent Among the Fantes.
4. *Kwame* is the name given to a male child born on Saturday, therefore when used for God it suggests his being masculine.

5. The origin of the world and existence of God is not questioned. Children are taught not to be very much concerned about how the world came into being. I remember as a child being told that if one begins to think about the origins of the world one will become insane.

6. This notion is much closer to Christian theology than to Islam. It can be a starting point for communicating the Christian message of the fallen race. The problem is Christian missionaries often did not take time to study Akan beliefs and legends and how some of those beliefs could be used to present the Christian message.

7. Interview with Rev. De Graft Johnson, March 19, 1992.

8. The numbers three and seven constantly recur in Akan ritual, mythology, and secular matters. For example, the number of Akan *ebusua* is seven, and the chief's council of elders is also seven.

9. The name is derived from *nana*, an appellation of praise or respect for gods, ancestors or elders, and *pow* which means a grove.

10. The author has witnessed one such case where a woman was reportedly lost for several days. A search party tried in vain to look for her in the forest. After a period of about two months the woman was found one morning at the outskirts of the village dressed in a traditional priestly robe. It was believed that the woman was taken away by dwarfs into the forest. This woman has become a traditional healer and many people, including some church members, go to consult her.

11. Christensen (1954:75) is of the view that a complaint of evil magic is most likely to be given as an extreme form of rationalization, or to come from a person with paranoid tendencies, and that the neurotic deviant presents the most probable targets as well as being the person most likely to confess to being guilty of practicing *anyen*—witchcraft.

12. Westerners have often interpreted the preoccupation of Africans with their ancestors as a sign of being primitive. They fail however to recognize, as G. W. Trompf aptly observes that "the Chinese and the Japanese, for example, have achieved their so called 'high civilization' while paying very dutiful respect to their forebears" (1991:14).

13. Other Akan groups like the Ashantis observe the *Adae* ceremony where a ritual for the ancestral stool is held every six weeks.

14. Of all the supernatural forces recognized by the Fante, one of the most difficult to clarify or delineate is the nature and function of the *egyabosom* and

the affiliated concept of the *kra* (soul) and *sunsum* (spirit). There is considerable difference of opinion on the interpretation of this concept among the various Akan groups. According to Christensen (1954:81) the Fante concept of *egyabosom*, may be equated with, but is not identical to, the Ashanti concept of *ntoro* as described by Rattray (1923:45)

15. The author himself has had the experience of a child born who had already been circumcised.

16. Interview conducted on March 18, 1992. Original copy of recorded interview is in the possession of the writer.

17. The practice is no longer observed today as many parents now tend to circumcise children when they are young, usually before they reach the age of three months.

18. According to Akan custom, children belong to their mother's family because Akan society is matrilineal.

19. The writer himself went through the traditional form of marriage before the church marriage.

20. See Christensen (1954:58) for a detailed discussion of Fante forms of marriage.

21. One problem that is occurring in some cementaries in Ghana is the practice of uncovering the grave of persons buried. It is unknown what these grave looters are looking for. But there is no doubt that they are looking for the fine ornaments and jewels the dead was buried with. It is also possible that the looters are looking for human parts on which to perform some magic rituals.

22. Death is thought to be like a river which must be crossed before the spirit can get to *samanadze*—the land of the spirits. The money given to the corpse is to be used to pay for the canoe or ferry fare and provide gifts for the ancestors on arrival in the world beyond.

23. There has been public outcries against the expensive and elaborate ceremonies, especially from church leaders, but all these have fallen on deaf ears. Partly because people want to give good impressions about themselves to the outside world.

24. This practice of carrying a pot is no longer strictly observed. Some societies particularly in the rural areas do observe it, however.

SECTION II

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER 4

Early Methodist Missionary Work in Ghana

In this chapter we explore the history of Methodism in Ghana and particularly their work among the Akans. An examination of the history of the church will help us understand why the church today is left with a legacy of split-level Christianity and how best to deal with it. The history encompasses not only the activities of missionaries and the faithful, but also the entire social, cultural, political, and religious milieu in which they found themselves. Again, the relevance of looking at the history of early missionary efforts lies in the fact that the present is the sum of past histories, while the future is the projection forward of these histories. The importance of the past cannot therefore be overemphasized; without it, like the amnesiac person, we cannot know who we are.

A complete history of over a century and half since the introduction of Methodism into Ghana is beyond the scope of the present work.¹ It is appropriate, however, that we look at those aspects of the history which are relevant for our study. It is hoped that in this somehow selective appraisal, some insights will be gained into the problem that this thesis seeks to address, i.e the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices which has resulted in split-level Christianity.

Missionary Achievements

For a balanced judgement of Akan experience of missionary Christianity, it is essential to highlight some aspects of the missionary ventures that have characterized these years. Again our discussion of early missionary work in Ghana will not be complete if we fail to recognize the many successes that crowned the missionary efforts.

The contributions of Western missionaries are far more numerous than is generally acknowledged. It cannot be denied that in many parts of Ghana as in other places in Africa, there stands in eloquent testimony, obvious monumental contributions of the missionaries in the field of education, hospitals and church buildings. The presence of many vital congregation in Ghana is a sure indication of the success of the early missionary endeavor. Today we can rejoice that the seed they planted has germinated and grown even if we see it as split-level Christianity. The missionaries have laid the foundation for the spread of the gospel in Africa, and it is this foundation upon which we must build, regardless if we feel positively and negatively about it.

It is fair to say that in spite of some of the shortcomings of the missionary enterprise in Ghana, the constructive deeds done outweighed those with negative results. It will be difficult to recount all the achievements of the missionaries in this work. Suffice to say that by far the greatest contribution that the missionaries made was in the field of education. Missionaries

promoted education through the establishment of schools as part of their evangelism efforts.

Missionary contributions in the field of education have even been acknowledged by people who have been somewhat critical of Christian missionaries. The late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, and an outspoken critic of colonialism in Africa, in an address to the International Missionary Council meeting in Accra, Ghana noted that:

Our primary education in fact goes back to as far as 1752 and was begun by the missionaries and continued by them for a very long time...It must be admitted that we owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the missionaries for the contribution they made. (1958:158)

Many national figures of the calibre of John Mensah Sarbah, J.E. Caseley-Hayford, Dr. Kwegyir-Aggrey, Dr. K. A. Busia and many others who have provided leadership to the country were all products of the mission schools. We should always remain grateful to the missionaries for their various contributions.

The missionaries also did well at promoting translation. For example the Methodist established a book depot in 1883. Among other aims, the depot was to publish and make literature available to the people. The Basel Missionaries in Ghana also did well in promoting the vernacular language. Sanneh (1989) has noted the contribution of Christian missionaries in promoting translation. In this book Sanneh forcefully argues that because

language and culture are closely intertwined in traditional societies, missionary pioneers often acted in (many times against their own intentions) as vernacular agents. Sanneh uses this argument to rebut the stereotype of missionaries as cultural iconoclasts.

Sanneh is very right here. My only problem with his thesis, however, is that he appears to be interpreting the tight nexus between language and culture from the modern point of view. One wonders whether the missionaries had the same understanding or were obliged to develop and use the vernacular for purely pragmatic considerations.

We must recognize the impact of the Scriptures on the indigenous people when they were made available to them in their own language. The Africans could read and interpret the Scriptures from their own background. One result of this is the emergence of indigenous African churches.

Before the advent of the missionaries, certain cultural practices existed which could be described as obnoxious. One such practice is human ritual sacrifice at the burial of chiefs. As we shall see later in this chapter, Thomas Freeman, the Methodist missionary, noted and recorded some of these practices in his diary during his visit to Ashanti. It is to the credit of the missionaries that they helped to put an end to those practices with the aid of the colonial administration

Early Efforts to Introduce Christianity

The nineteenth century saw the beginning of effective missionary activities in Ghana (formerly Gold Coast during the nineteenth century).² Like the biblical Abraham, missionaries left their countries and families and made their way into unknown lands in Africa and elsewhere.

It was during this century that four major denominations, Basel (Presbyterian), Wesleyan, Anglican, and Roman Catholic, established their presence in the country.

We list here the order of entry of the missions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Mission</u>
1828	Basel Mission (Presbyterian Church)
1835	Wesleyan Missionary Society
1847	North German Mission, Bremen
1880	Roman Catholic Mission
1896	Seventh-day Adventists
1904	S.P.G. Mission (Anglican). ³
1922	Salvation Army
1931	Assembly of God
1935	Apostolic Church

Before the missionaries arrived the Africans had some earlier contact with European traders and merchants. For over three hundred years the country had been a center of European and African trade in gold and slaves.

The Europeans built forts and castles along the coast from where they lived and conducted their training.

The first Europeans to arrive on the Guinea coast, were the Portuguese explorers. They landed at Elmina, a town along the coast of Ghana, on January 19, 1482. The Portuguese were followed by other European nationals; the Dutch, Danish and British trading interests. The Portuguese were however driven away in 1647 by the Dutch.

In the ship of the earliest Portuguese traders were Roman Catholic missionaries who served as chaplains to their compatriots on board the ship, and subsequently missionaries to the Africans. It is said of these Portuguese that when they arrived in Ghana:

they suspended the banner of Portugal from the bough of a lofty tree, at the foot of which they erected an altar, and the whole company assisted at the first mass that was celebrated in Guinea, and they prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry, and the perpetual prosperity of the church they intended to erect on the spot. (Williamson 1965:ix)

But this early missionary effort had no christianizing effects. Another early missionary effort was made between 1752 and 1824. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) sent out at the request of the Royal African Company English clergymen to serve as chaplains to the merchants at Cape Coast. One of these, Thomas Thompson served five years.⁴ When Thompson left Cape Coast he took along with him three Fante boys with him to be educated in England. Two died but the third, Philip Quaake, was ordained in the Anglican church and returned to Cape Coast to serve as schoolmaster and

chaplain at the castle. The school where he taught was supported by the Royal African Company, and was mainly for the children of the Europeans.

The Planting of the Methodist Church

Methodist mission work in Ghana began with the arrival of Joseph Dunwell as the first Wesleyan missionary, on New Year's Day 1835. It should be noted that the Wesleyan Mission worked predominantly among the Fante people of the Coastal area. The story of the beginning of Methodism begins, however, before the time of arrival of the first missionary. In March, 1831 there was already in existence in Cape Coast some Christian groups organized by native people. One of these groups was started by William de Graft. Members of this group also called themselves the "Meeting", or the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The group met to study the Bible.⁵

Most of the members of this group were products of a school at the Cape Coast castle started by Governor Sir Charles McCarthy, and headed by Joseph Smith, an African. Members of the group also attended some public services organized in the castle by the European chaplains. De Graft has started this rival group following a disagreement between him and Joseph Smith, his former teacher, over the interpretation of the Bible.⁶

To satisfy their hunger and thirst for the word of God, William de Graft requested more Bibles through a merchant sailor named of Captain Porter, who happened to be a Methodist. Apparently there was a desire among the

group to learn more about the new faith. De Graft had met Captain Porter at Dixcove where he had gone to settle after having been imprisoned by Governor Maclean.⁷

On his return to England Captain Porter reported to the committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society the news of the eager young Africans wanting Bibles. Potter impressed on the committee the need for immediate action and offered to take a missionary to the Gold Coast (Ghana) in his own ship at no cost to the society. He was even prepared to bring the missionary back if after observation he did not think the Gold Coast was a good opening for the gospel.

By divine design, the request coincided with the evangelical revival in England and a renewed interest in religious and philanthropic work in Britain and in the welfare and spiritual progress of Africa. The great Act of Emancipation had also come into effect on July 31, 1834. There was a sense of obligation among the British to enlighten Africans, and the need for reparations for the harm done to the Africans through the slave trade. The slave trade was to be replaced with legitimate trade in goods and the African must be converted to Christianity. As Uka has observed:

Concern for Africa flowed from some of the most vivid conceptions of Victorian religious and political life. And for this reason the chief African issues for the Victorians were atonement and duty. The chain had to be broken from the African's neck. He must be converted. He must be civilized. One should trade with him. One must open the gates of progress to him. (1989:77)

F. L. Bartels (1965) has noted the address of Sir Thomas Foxwell Buxton,

at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society at Exeter Hall in May 1834 and the appeal he made for missionaries to Africa.⁸

Remember the wrongs of Africa; and remember that the only compensation you can offer is religious instruction... I conclude by saying again, one hundred missionaries, if you please! I cannot be content with one less than a hundred from this society. (Cited in Bartels 1965:10)

It is rather ironic that during the nineteenth century when the Christian faith was under attack in Britain from post-Darwinian science and positivist philosophies, such as August Comte's writing, Methodism became distinctively evangelical in its missionary zeal. Price (1991:81) notes that "Fund raising and administrative tasks at home had increased to support the rapidly expanding missionary work overseas."

It is to be expected that when the request from Ghana reached the Methodist Missionary Society, they lost no time in responding. Dunwell was one of those who offered to go wherever he would be sent. He was commissioned by the British Conference and sent to Ghana. The members of the Bible Band could scarcely believe their ears when they were told that not only had their Bibles arrived, but a missionary also. The request for Bibles therefore pre-empted the launching of the Methodist mission in Ghana. The arrival of the Bibles and the young clergyman, Rev. Joseph Dunwell at Cape Coast on January 1, 1835 therefore marked the birth of Ghana Methodism.

Before Dunwell set his foot on Ghanaian soil as the first British Methodist missionary, the place had already been prepared for Methodism to

take root and grow by the devoted nationals wanting to know more about Christianity.⁹ Small wonder that he was enthusiastically received by members of the Band. Dunwell settled down quickly to work, and by March 1835, he had issued fifty membership tickets.

The story of the beginnings of the Methodist Church in Ghana started rather on a sad note due to high incidence of ill-health and death among the early missionaries. On June 21—six months after landing—Dunwell was stricken down with fever, and in a few days he passed to a higher service. His flock resolved to remain in the faith with the local people taking charge of the leadership. The members of the church continued to meet for study of the Scriptures and for prayer.

Dunwell was succeeded in 1836 by two missionary couples--Rev and Mrs George Wrigley and the Rev and Mrs Peter Harrop—but as fate would have it, death again laid its icy hands upon all the four within a year of their arrival. These were the "missionary martyrs" who succumbed to the climate and tropical disease.¹⁰

The high incidence of death and ill-health among the missionaries greatly militated against expansion of work during this early period of introduction of Methodism. Writing in 1951 about West Africa, the then Africa Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, stated "In the forty years following 1811, 93 missionaries and 31 wives sailed for the three areas of Gambia, Freetown and the Gold Coast (Ghana); of these 41 men and 16 wives

died" (Williamson 1965:14). Africa at that time was regarded by the Europeans, as the "Dark Continent."

It has often been said that early missionaries to Africa packed their belonging in coffins because they had a short time. The discovery of quinine as a cure for malaria, and the use of mosquito nets helped to reduce the mortality rate and paved the way for more substantial and lasting missionary penetration. We must note that the high incidence of death and ill-health led to the promotion of medical missions which were originally meant to prolong the life of missionaries, rather than the natives.

At the time when it was becoming virtually impossible to recruit missionaries to Ghana, due to frequent death and ill-health, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman volunteered to be sent to Ghana. Freeman became the architect of Methodist expansion in Ghana. He worked hard to lay the foundations for Methodism both among the Fante and Asante. In Freeman was finally found a man who could stand the climate partly because of his African descent. He was the son of an English mother and a negro father.

Freeman arrived on January 3, 1837. His personal grace and piety won him the friendship of African people and chiefs everywhere. Many of the coastal people responded to his message. But he was also a source of considerable controversy as his journal reveals. With great faith and courage he pioneered to Kumasi and Asante (1839) and Dahomey (1843) and later Badagry and Abeokuta in Nigeria.

Rev. Freeman was always on the go and never settled down for intensive work in any one place. He helped to establish the gospel among the Ashantis and other peoples of Ghana. He travelled and preached and built churches throughout West Africa. He contributed towards the maintenance of peace with the Ashantis and the Fantes and other coastal tribes. The Ashantis were a powerful state and had been fighting with many tribes along the coast in an effort to control the sea ports which were a link between themselves and the Europeans. This inter-tribal war between the Ashantis and the coastal people was obviously a hindrance to early missionary efforts.

Freeman was able to visit Ashanti in April 1839 and was warmly received by the king of Ashanti (Asantehene). Through his visits he was able to establish a mission in Ashanti. The detail account of this visit is recorded in his journal.¹¹

Wiltgen (1956:112) notes that Freeman went not only up and down the Gold Coast seeking and accepting new missions in spite of decimated personnel, but he was also absorbed with the building of many churches. His enthusiasm for the work led him to overspend. As a result he was removed from his post as superintendent of the mission by the Mission Committee in 1857. Bills for his construction programs had piled high, and he was charged with persistent disregard of advice and direction by the Missionary Committee in England.

The work of the mission had grown steadily under Freeman's leadership; and his absence somehow retarded the work. Freeman was asked to return to work with the mission on September 1, 1873, having taken a position with the colonial administration during his dismissal. He was able to return to the ministry because of the great appreciation for his service to the church. However, it must be said of Freeman that in spite of all his good works and his living in the country for about fifty years, he never gave a single address in the Fante language. He always spoke through an interpreter. Freeman is a typical example of the English of this colonial period who were very proud of their "Queen's English" and showed very little interest in learning other languages. Comparing the Wesleyan missionaries and the Basel missionaries Williamson says that:

The Wesleyans seem to have fared worse, partly because they maintained far fewer missionaries, partly because with but two exceptions long service was unknown. The Basel missionaries enjoyed better health, remained longer, and found time to acquire the vernacular and learn the ways of the people. The Wesleyan missionaries, few in number and overburdened, working in an area where administration (whether by Crown or through merchants) and trade required the extensive use of English, rarely learned the vernacular, and had little time to study the customs of the people; on the other hand they did raise up and give authority to their native pastors. (1965:12)

In the hundred years 1825-1928, the Basel mission sent out 236 missionaries; between 1835-1935 the Wesleyans sent 110 missionaries and 42 women workers (Williamson 1965:14).

Methods of Evangelism

The missionaries employed many methods to win converts. One of their methods was to use education as a tool for evangelism. The village schools became the nucleus of their work which they used to win the confidence of the people. Through the mission schools churches were established in various communities. Christian religion was taught as part of the curriculum of the schools. Church attendance was often made compulsory for the children who attended the mission schools. The schools were also to produce catechists for the church as well as clerks for the government and other European trading agencies.

Strict moral discipline was enforced in many of the mission schools. The school system became the means of Christian education by the church. Little emphasis was placed upon religious education within the organization of the church itself.¹² Whiteman has identified (1983:185) a similar association of the "schools" and Christianity in Melanesia. He writes:

The first step in becoming a convert was therefore to associate with a mission school established in a village. If a pagan village collectively decided that it wanted to become Christian, a deputation would be sent to the district missionary requesting that a school be established in their own village. (1983:185)

What Whiteman observes here about the Melanesians is also true of the Akans.

The schools also became the means of the civilizing process which the missionaries saw as an integral part of their mission. The schools succeeded in inculcating British cultural values into African children. A common accusation

against those who attended schools was that they did not know their culture. It must be noted that missionary education was used by many as a stepping stone to gain employment and climb the social ladder. It was also a means of escape from the monotonous routine of agricultural labor.¹³ Thus many would make the effort to meet the preconditions of the schools such as attending church services and abiding by the strict discipline in the schools. But whether they continued with that after leaving school is another matter.

The church also established Teacher Training Colleges as a means of training both teachers and catechists for their schools and churches. On completion of school many of the graduates were appointed as teacher-catechists. As Bartels (1965:227) observes the "Methodist Church in Ghana tended to look to the schools to produce its literate membership, supply its teachers, catechists, and ministers, and provide its lay leadership."

It must be said of the schools that they created a social barrier between those who had the advantage of attending them and those who did not. Those who attended schools were referred to as *krakye* and those who did not were called *frutamnyi*. The result of this was that a new social position conforming to European standards was sought for. There was also a tendency on the part of those who received western education to look down upon the traditional culture. The method of evangelism employed had the result of making the church another social class. As Dickson observes:

The result of this pattern of evangelism employed in the nineteenth century has been that the Methodist Church in Ghana, and elsewhere in Africa, tends to have a middle class image. The minister's outfit, the silver communion vessels, and so on, seems to set the church apart from life as the ordinary man experiences it. (1981:197-198)

A survey conducted in Ghana by the author in some selected Methodist Churches in 1985 confirms Dickson's observation. Over 60 percent of members claim to have attended mission school.

What has been said above must not be interpreted to mean that mission schools were not entirely successful as an evangelistic tool. There were many who continued with the church after school, though several others dropped.¹⁴ In addition to the regular schools, the church also organized Sunday schools which tended to have literacy classes. The aim was to enable people to read the Bible in their own language.

Besides education, the missionaries employed yet another method in maintaining their converts. As we shall see later in this chapter, they tried to create an entirely new cultural environment for their converts. They made an attempt to separate converts from their people in order not to be ensnared into traditional religious practices. For example, chapels and mission houses were built at the outskirts of the villages.

Camp Meetings

The Methodist frequently organized "Camp Meetings" as a means of spreading the Word. It was Freeman who introduced the Camp Meetings. Members of the church from societies constituting a circuit would gather in an appointed village for a period of time, usually three days. The aim was to revive the church members as well as attract the non-Christian community to the church. The camp meetings were successful in bringing people to the church. Many conversions were reported to have occurred at such meetings, and thus adding many members to the church. Williamson has given a vivid description of the camp meetings:

Christians of the area belonging to the denomination gather in an appointed village; homes in the village and surrounding villages are visited, processions of witness are held, and conventions for preaching and testimony take place. For the Christians taking part the camp meeting is in part a joyous outing, in part a serious evangelistic task. The non-Christian community is undoubtedly impressed by the organized membership, well-dressed and possessed of new skills and insights, exhibited in the singing of hymns, the use of a sacred book, and the services conducted under the leadership of educated ministers and catechists. The testimonies and sermons are delivered in the atmosphere of a mass rally, with its attendant emotional impact. At such meetings many conversions occur, sometimes in hundreds, of people formerly untouched. Fetish priests have been known to bring their fetishes to a public burning. (1965:24)

The description of the camp meetings given here by Williamson tallies well with those I have experienced in my ministry. Religious emotions were usually at high tide during these meetings. There were often sudden and spectacular conversions. Through such meetings many people were enrolled

in catechumen classes, but it appears there was not adequate follow up of these converts because of the limited personnel. The task of teaching or preparing new members for baptism and confirmation was entrusted into the hands of the catechists and caretakers.

It will be appropriate at this juncture to discuss how people who responded to the missionaries' message were prepared for church membership. The course of instruction consisted of memorizing some catechism and Scripture passages. The missionary or the African minister baptized or confirmed the candidates during his visit to the church. In this way people became full members of the church without being fully grounded in the Christian faith. This situation is prevalent even today. Churches were divided into circuits which comprise several congregations. These were often under the leadership of a single pastor. With such a heavy work load the pastors did not take time to prepare the candidates for baptism and confirmation.

Children were also baptized in accordance with the Methodist practice of infant baptism. It appears that these children were not adequately nurtured in the Christian faith. Churches were supposed to keep a **cradle roll** to ensure a follow up by the church members of children baptized until they became full members of the church. But these were not strictly followed.

The small number of pastors meant that they were not able to give adequate pastoral oversight to their flock. The churches were directed by missionaries at much longer range who visited less frequently, perhaps only

once or twice a year. Assistant missionaries (African pastors) were permanently stationed to oversee churches which were in some instances over fifteen miles away. They preached in these churches and administered the sacraments often twice or thrice a year and on such special occasions as the funeral or harvest and thanksgiving services. They were not often available to give counselling and guidance to both the new and old converts. Such tasks were entrusted in the hands of Catechists and caretakers who were not adequately trained or equipped to perform those pastoral duties. It is to be expected that converts did not receive adequate teachings to grow into maturity in their Christian faith.

In addition to their normal pastoral duties the pastors were local managers of the mission schools responsible for paying the salaries of teachers etc. Williamson (1965:40) reports that in 1949 the Methodist church managed 683 schools under 55 pastors, an average of 12 schools per pastor. In 1954 the total number of primary schools had risen to 719, with the same number of pastors.

With such limited resources the church was not able to provide adequate shepherding for those who have adopted the Christian faith from a background of traditional religion. Those people need far more than a hurried course of elementary instruction in the Christian faith, if they were to come into a real understanding of the Christian Gospel, and of the demands it makes on the those who profess allegiance to it.

Indigenous Workers

In furtherance of the avowed aims of the Mission Society to foster an indigenous ministry in mission areas, the missionaries employed indigenous workers. Candidates were selected and trained to help in the work of the mission. Those Ghanaian Methodist ministers were regarded as assistant missionaries. William de Graft was the first indigenous worker appointed by Freeman.

In the report of the Methodist Missionary Society in 1842 various reasons were given for why the Methodist mission considered an indigenous ministry necessary. According to the report, the local people trained as ministers would be "intimately acquainted with the superstitions and heathen customs of their country" and will be in a better position to "secure, by their practical sympathy, the affection of their unhappy countrymen, and to assail more effectively the idolatrous system by which they are enslaved" (Methodist Mission Society Report 1842:160) The report further indicates that indigenous workers were employed due to the harsh tropical climate and the high mortality rate among the European missionaries. This would relieve the English missionary from "the burden and heat of the day" and leave him more at liberty to superintend and direct the work" (Methodist Mission Society Report 1842:160).

It appears however that missionary policy in making use of the indigenous workers was not aimed at preparing them to take over and be

responsible for developing an indigenous ministry. The Methodist Mission Society report gives the impression that indigenization was only seen in terms of raising local leadership who were required to play a subordinate role to the missionary who was still in charge. Part of the report reads:

The training of Native Agents is not recommended, for the purpose of superseding European Missionaries. A native ministry must for a long time be employed chiefly as an auxiliary force; and the utmost pecuniary exertion of the Society will be requested to send English Missionaries in sufficient numbers to regulate existing Missions, and to embrace those openings for extended usefulness which everywhere. (1842:16O)

In furtherance with their objective of raising local leadership, the mission set up a local institution in Accra to give a kind of instant "microwave training" to prepare local people for the ministry. A missionary in the person of Rev. Samuel Shipman was sent by the Missionary Society to be responsible for the training of people for the ministry.¹⁵

Again the training was geared towards making the Ghanaian minister a "xeroxed copy" of the missionaries. For example, they dressed in the same style as the missionaries and preached in the same style. They also learned to preach in English. The titles given to them as Assistant missionaries was most fitting.¹⁶ Thus even though local people were recruited for the reason that they would be "intimately acquainted with the superstitious customs" of their people, in practice the training offered them did not equip them to fulfill that task.¹⁷ As Dickson has noted:

The training given to the agents was such as to make them little inclined to know the traditional life and thought closely; hence they were as ineffective as the missionaries in meeting the people at the point of their faith in "gods many and lords many."(1976:176)

Methodist Rules and Regulations

Christianity was presented to the people as a set of rules to follow rather than a way of life. There was therefore a kind of external pressure put on the people to adapt to the new way of life. The missionaries imposed a number of rules and regulations upon the people as if salvation was earned by the observance of those rules rather than through grace. For example the use and sale of alcoholic drink was not permitted among members. The obvious problem with this rule was that most of the traditional practices involve the use of alcoholic drink. Members were also not to engage in traditional drumming and dancing. These rules were often enforced without taking into consideration the traditional life and culture of the people. Dickson has made the same observation:

Any one who has read *The Ecclesiastical Principles and Policy of the Wesleyan Methodists*, the third edition of which was published in 1873, will be aware that the British missionary and his Ghanaian colleagues were expected to be familiar with a veritable battery of rules and regulations. They were under obligation to enforce these rules in a part of the world where customs and ways appeared to be particularly at variance with the mode of life being inculcated along with the preaching of Christ. (1981:196)

Bartels reports how Dunwell sought to enforce the rule of membership especially those on marriage:

Dunwell was greatly exercised by the way in which the rules of membership, especially those on marriage, impeded the growth of the church. He asked male members "to put away all their women except one" who was considered the lawful wife. (1965:17)

The Akan culture sanctioned polygamy and many of the converts were not ready to accept the new rule. It is interesting that to this day some of those rules continue to be enforced by the church. One of the questions which is asked in conference about ministers is "Does he observe our rules?"

These rules and regulations which are enshrined in the Methodist constitution have often been strictly enforced as if they are the gospel. One often hears these words from both the laity and the clergy: *onnye hen ntoyee*, which means it is not our practice as Methodists. The interesting thing is that some of these rules and regulations are not strictly observed by the mother church in Britain.

The strict enforcement of Methodist rules and regulation has in many cases led to some schisms within the church. A noted example is in 1907 when a former Methodist minister Rev. J. B. Anaman led a group of dissident members of the Methodist Church at Anomabo to form the Nigritian Church. This group of forty members had been expelled from the Methodist Church for flouting the Church's ruling concerning Singing Bands. So uncompromising was the church's position that the circuit minister refused to bury one of the members of the singing band in the Methodist cemetery. The group was left with no choice but to leave the church.

Nature of Churches Planted

The missionaries planted churches along the pattern of the British Methodist Church in terms of architecture and character. Many of the churches built had steeples. The Saltpond Methodist Church for example has a double steeple which looks like an imitation of Westminster Abbey in London.

Local preachers were encouraged to preach "English Methodism." They were to be properly dressed like Europeans whenever they mounted the pulpit. Record of a Special District meeting held on March 12, 1849 affirms our reading of the historical data. In that meeting local preachers were encouraged to visit the smaller societies to preach "English Methodism." The meeting further recommended that in every congregation "the most pious and intelligent person" be appointed leader; by so doing "English Methodism" will be more fully carried out, and Christianity will advance among the people in the interior by a more natural growth.

Congregations were divided into societies, and circuits, with superintendent ministers overseeing the affairs of the circuits. The ministers resided at the circuit headquarters. Like the partitioning of Africa among European powers these divisions were often done without taking into consideration the existing traditional boundaries.¹⁸

Impact of Colonial Rule

The period of the greatest European expansion in Africa was also that of tremendous missionary advance on the continent. In attempting to understand the impact of Christian mission activities, one cannot fail to recognize the entanglement between mission and colonialism; in the case of Ghana, the role of British colonial administration. There can not be any question that colonialism has left a thorough imprint on the political and economic life as well as religio-cultural life of the people. Any visitor to Ghana cannot fail to observe the prepondence of traces left over from the colonial days. As Pope-Levison and Levison have rightly noted:

When the European colonizers came to sub-Sahara Africa, beginning in the fifteenth century, they succeeded in replacing the African way of life with European political, economic, social, and religious institutions. No area of African life was left untouched. (1992:89)

The Europeans had established their presence through various trading companies. The first contact with Europe was in January, 1482 when the Portuguese expedition, under Diego d'Azambuja, arrived at Elmina, along the coast of Ghana. The Portuguese built Elmina Castle as a permanent trading post. Other merchants from Europe including the Dutch and Danes and later the English came to Ghana and built forts and castles along the coast where they lived and conducted their trade with the natives. The next 230 years were marked by constant struggle between the European powers along the Coast, with the British emerging as the superpower in 1874.

In 1844 the Fante chiefs signed a bond recognizing Queen Victoria's jurisdiction over the area. It was not until 1874 that the British Crown declared the coastal area a Colony. From 1826 to 1900 the British fought a long series of campaigns against the Ashantis of the interior, and only in 1901 did they succeed in making the Ashanti and the northern territory protectorates. Cape Coast was the center of the British administration. The British ruled the country until March 6, 1957 when Ghana became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to become independent from colonial rule.

The historical conjunction between the nineteenth-century missionary movement and colonialism led to a complicated relationship between missionaries and the colonial authorities. In Ghana, for example the Anglican mission was very much associated with the government in the castle and was called English Church Mission or *aban mu asor* in the Fante language (Pobee 1991:42). Harrison Wright in his introduction to Freeman's (1968:x) journal says that Governor Maclean and the merchants of the coast felt that the goals of Christianity, of trade, and of British authority in West Africa were not incompatible with each other. Thus on the one hand missionaries felt entitled to the support of the colonial administration, and on the other hand the colonial administrators felt justified in incorporating the missionary spheres into the empire.¹⁹

Missionaries have often been accused of being the "handmaids of White imperialism". It is really difficult to dispute that Christianity made its rapid

advances because its emissaries, the missionaries, were so closely linked with the whole apparatus of colonial rule. In many instances colonialism directly or indirectly aided the spread of Christianity. In Ghana, the mission schools enjoyed the support of the colonial administration, thus giving political backing to the use of mission schools as an instrument of evangelization.

The colonial government also encouraged the destruction of some traditional shrines. For example, the Aberewa shrine, Kwasi Badu's medicine, and the shrines of *hwe me so* were officially suppressed and declared illegal because some of their activities were seen as opposed to progress. Debrunner (1959:132) cites the case of a District Commissioner closing down the private road to a fetish town. Dubrunner further affirms that "government decisions to destroy shrines were often taken in deference to missionary opinion" (1959:132).

By their race, nationality, culture, and religion the missionaries were identified with the colonial masters in the eyes of the African population. Regardless of the many differences, and even hostilities between the missionaries and the colonial powers, there was an inevitable cultural bond that drew the missionaries to the friendship of the colonialists. The Africans were quick to recognize this.

Christianity was seen as part of the colonial apparatus. Missionaries were therefore regarded as agents of colonialism. Small wonder that during the rise of nationalism Christianity and colonialism were seen as two sides of

the same coin. As Price has rightly observed:

However well intentioned, self-sacrificing (many died particularly in West Africa), and committed to improving the lot of the people they ministered to, it cannot but be acknowledged that the Methodist missionaries of the nineteenth century were part of the imperialist colonial scene, ministering initially to those continuing a British cultural and religious way of life in an alien environment which was regarded as lying in "darkness." (1991:79)

The situation in Ghana was complicated by the fact that both the Methodist missionaries and the colonial authorities were all British. The colonial administration, particularly Governor George Maclean, was very supportive of the missionaries. He was Freeman's friend and best helper in establishing Methodism in Ghana. Southon (1934:44) notes that Governor Maclean agreed with Freeman in his scheme for building a really suitable mission house, and eventually it was Maclean who sold to Freeman as representing the Wesleyan Missionary Society, the little hill in Cape Coast on which most of the Methodist property stands today. Governor Maclean also presided over the first missionary meeting organized by Freeman on September 3rd 1838 in Cape Coast (Southon 1934:49).

In a letter to the Wesleyan Missionary Society dated September 11, 1841 Maclean assured the society of his personal support. He wrote:

I beg to assure you that my poor services may be made at all times available, for the furtherance of the great cause, to which you and so many others have devoted their lives and means.
(Freeman 1968:92)

Evidently the support given by the colonial administration might also have contributed to the lack of opposition to the missionaries, particularly by

the traditional priests. The support of the colonial government was particularly helpful in starting mission work among the Ashantis. Maclean assisted Freeman by providing him with an African sergeant and private to escort him and an interpreter together with a letter of introduction to the King of Ashanti. Thus Freeman's personal safety was almost guaranteed on his first visit to Kumasi. Southon (1934:90) says that though Freeman was suspected of being a servant of the Government, no hostile action was taken against him lest it should involve the Ashantis in war with the Europeans. Southon who himself was a missionary to Ghana again acknowledges the mutual relationship between the missionaries and the colonial administration when he writes:

The Gold Coast has been unusually fortunate in having at the head of its Government men who were either sincere Christians or who, at the least were sympathetic with all efforts made to win the people for Christ. Because of this friendly co-operation of Government and mission from the earliest days Gold Coast Methodism has never had to pass through periods of fiery testing such as have so frequently come in other Mission fields. While the Government has never used its power to proselytize, it has always been there to give protection to those who for conscience sake incur the anger of priests or chiefs by breaking with old gods. (1934:102)

In spite of the support given to the missionaries, the presence of the colonialists and other European merchants also presented some obstacles and hinderance to the mission. The issue here has to do with sexual promiscuousness and moral debauchery on the part of some of the Europeans. The situation was complicated by the fact that many Akans uncritically

identified every white person with Christianity. They were therefore quick to recognize their vice rather than their religion. All this had the effect of making some Akans doubt the credibility of the gospel being preached to them by the same white people. Some Akans felt that the missionaries were "throwing dust into their eyes" and became suspicious of the missionaries who were condemning their traditional life and thought.

Freeman seems to have recognized this problem when he suggested to the Methodist Mission Society to send out English laymen whose life would "second our efforts here in establishing under the blessing of almighty God, a Christian Church." (Dickson 1977:16)

African Christian Initiatives

One factor often overlooked in the spread of Christianity in Africa is the extent to which the local people were involved in spreading the gospel. All too often the spread of Christianity has been seen as solely the work of Western missionaries. The immense and valuable contribution of Africans to the success of the missionary efforts has largely been unrecognized in the history of Christian mission in Africa.

The success of early missionary work among the Akans owes more to indigenous efforts. Many Akan members of the church, as traders, teachers, government officers stationed in various places were responsible for the planting of churches in those areas. For example, before Freeman started a

mission in Ashanti, a Fante by the name of John Smith, a leader from Cape Coast who had gone to live in Kumasi, had started a church among a number of people from the coast who had settled there (Methodist Church, Ghana Foundation Conference 1961:22)

The work of William Wade Harris (Prophet Harris) which resulted in mass conversions can hardly pass without notice. Harris' work in Ivory Coast and parts of Western Ghana can be described as one of the most remarkable movements in the whole history of Christianity in Africa. After his conversion experience in prison, Harris felt the call to preach and started a very successful mission in 1914 to Ivory Coast and parts of Western Ghana. In Ivory Coast he encountered some opposition with the French colonial authorities, and some of his followers were persecuted.

Harris preached with power, calling on people to repent and be baptized. Many people including fetish priests responded to his message. Harris bade many who responded to his message to build churches in their villages and wait for teachers who would come later to give them instructions which he had no time to do. Many of Harris' converts found their way into the existing churches—Methodist and Catholic. Where there were no existing churches the new churches waited for a missionary to come. A Methodist report in 1923 speaks of some of his converts in Nzima still waiting and singing their own vernacular lyrics, as for example:

We have a burden, a burden of sin

We know not how to get rid of it

Whiteman, we bring our burden to you. (Methodist Missionary Society Report 1923:120)

Harris' movement was so phenomenal that the established churches could not completely absorb his movement. Debrunner says that:

The Harris followers for a long time waited for catechists and missionaries, but in many places the bamboo chapels collapsed after they had waited for five years, and the religious enthusiasm either died down or was channelled into one or other of the new faith healing churches. (1967:267)

Another indigenous effort which requires our attention is the work of Prophet Samson Oppon in Ashanti during the 1920s. With a grayish oval-shaped flat stone in one hand and a long wooden cross in the other, Oppon went about preaching. Unlike the Basel Mission, the Methodist Church accepted Oppon. He even accompanied one of the Methodist missionaries, the Rev. Waterworth, on a tour of Ashanti. Under his fiery preaching, hundreds of people sought enrolment in the Church (Bartels 1965:188). Oppon's mission contributed in no small way to the firm establishment of the Wesleyan mission in Ashanti which had remained very resistant to missionary efforts.

African Indigenous Churches

We must also point out the efforts by Africans to develop indigenous churches. Some of these new religious movements have appropriated symbols

from traditional African religions and given them a new twist. At any rate, the African Independent Church movement is a creative attempt by Africans to adapt Christianity to their situations, independent of foreign missionaries²⁰

The phenomenal growth of these churches is sending shock waves to the historic mission founded churches who have lost some of their members to these churches.

One significant person who has worked hard to get the attention of these movements before the missiological community is Harold Turner. In acknowledging Turner's enormous contribution Wilbert Shenk writes:

Combining appreciation for these movements with an understanding of the phenomenon worldwide and its manifold interfaces with the historical Christian churches, Turner has attempted to lay on the conscience of the Christian community, its responsibility to come to terms with the complex features of the Modern Mission... Turner has continually worked to contribute to scholarly understanding of these movements.. (1990:182)

The many types of these movements in Africa make it difficult to discuss them exhaustively. Oosthuizen (1992) has identified the following different types:

- 1) those who follow the established approach and the doctrinal norms which the so called established churches uphold;
- 2) those who have established pentecostal church approaches but, nevertheless, with minor differences when it comes to the ministry and the interpretation of the sacraments, especially baptism;
- 3) those who follow the original tenets of the Christian Catholic Church in Zion and remain consistent with its teaching and administration as well as the Ethiopian Churches and some with the Apostolic faith background;
- 4) those who are no longer original Ethiopian, Zionist or Apostolic, but who have departed to a limited extent only, from the mainline churches;
- 5) those who are marginal, and who are often treated by the above mentioned

categories as apostate because they are deeply embedded in the traditional world view and its metaphysical forces. (1992:XX)

One of the characteristics of these churches is that they seriously take into account the traditional concerns, hopes and fears of many Africans, often ignored by the missionary established churches. In many respects the Independent churches under African leadership have brought Christianity into contact with traditional cosmologies. It is within these movements that Christianity is growing fast in Africa. In Ghana they have spread all across the country.

Many reasons account for the origins and growth of the African Independent Churches such as the stifling control missionaries exercised over their African converts and congregations, and the failure of the mission Christianity to penetrate African religiosity. We must point out that the movement was not a protest against the Christian faith per se. Initially they were breakaway groups from the missionary-established and controlled churches, but now many groups have emerged even from their own ranks.

A closer analysis of these movements will reveal certain factors that will have to be taken into account in any assessment of these movements. For example, some of them broke away from the mission-established churches for personal reasons, such as the desire for power rather than because of any attempt to indigenize Christianity. This point is attested by the fact that some of the worship services of these "independent" or "break-away" churches under African leadership remain closely modelled after the parent churches, The

M.D.C.C. Church in Ghana which broke away from the Methodist church continues to use the Methodist hymn book and practice the ecclesiology of the Methodist church such as "Circuit," "superintendent minister" etc. This is not however to say that the Church is completely modelled after the Methodist church. They have incorporated some aspects of Akan culture such as chieftaincy into their practice. The head of the church is addressed as *nana*—the same title given to a traditional chief

Some of these churches nowadays are virtually indistinguishable from the mainline churches from which they sprang. It must also be pointed out that the mission-established Churches have also adopted some of the characteristics of the Independent Churches such as drumming and dancing and their "spiritual song." The adoption of some of their practices has been a source of complaint by some members in the Methodist Church who think that the church is losing its sense of direction.²¹

The translation of the Scriptures into vernacular contributed greatly to the rise of these independent church movements.²² Many Africans reading the Scriptures in their own language began to apply it to their own situation. It could be said that the African Independent Churches have in some ways conscientised the missionary-established churches and led the way as far as indigenization of the church is concerned. Worship in these churches is a celebration in which all participate. They also incorporate in their worship service African forms of worship, which includes hand-clapping, dancing,

indigenous music, and faith healing. Small wonder that they have attracted followers not only from the non-Christian masses but also from members of the missionary-established churches who desert to find healing, rhythm, and ecstasy in worship and the freedom to practice polygamy.²³

It must be pointed out that these movements are essentially grassroots movements not founded by learned African theologians or highly educated or rich people. Some of the leaders have had no formal education or training in theology,²⁴ yet they are the source of most of the efforts being made today to render Christianity relevant to the African milieu

Missionary Life and Work

Assessing the work of the early missionaries is sometimes an unpleasant undertaking. One might be mistakenly interpreted as being anti-missionary. Again, it might appear arrogant to criticize the tremendously sacrificial services made by these early pioneers, and the hardship situations under which they labored. We have already noted the disease and death that plagued the early Methodist missionaries. Many of the missionaries who served suffered and died in honest endeavors to lay the foundation of Christianity in Africa.

Even though many of the early missionaries were aware that illness and death often awaited them, this did not prevent them from going to the mission field. This certainly showed their devotion and commitment to the task of

spreading the gospel. Evidently many of them were not just career missionaries but were very devoted servants of God. Nevertheless an evaluation of their ministry is necessary if we are to understand the problem of split-level Christianity which has been bequeathed to the church and is persisting even under indigenous leadership.

It seems to me that the problem has been an unintended consequence of a ministry that has been carried on over a long historical period but which the church today needs to seriously address. Our aim in evaluating the work of the missionaries is neither to engage in a wholesale condemnation of everything done by the missionaries, nor fail to recognize the many achievements of the missionary enterprise. We are only interested in finding out whether the missionary efforts contributed in any way to the problem of split-level Christianity with which the church today is confronted. We should also be able to raise some questions about some of their methods and attitudes. In any discussion of Christianity in Africa, the role played by the missionaries can hardly be forgotten.

Early Methodist missionaries to Ghana like many other missionary endeavors saw their duties purely in the sense of saving souls. It was this motive of rescuing the Africans from perishing that inspired many to volunteer to come to the African continent. It could be said especially of the Methodist missionaries that, coming from the tradition of John Wesley, they would naturally identify with Wesley's popular and most quoted statement that "you

have nothing to do but to save souls; to bring as many souls as possible to repentance, and to build them in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord" (Wesley, *Works* 8:304). In their efforts to accomplish their objectives they adopted some attitudes and methods, some of which have received criticism, especially from those who are opposed to missionary ventures.

Missionary Attitudes to Akan Religion

There is substantial literature on early missionary attitudes towards the religion and culture of the people they encountered. Notable among them are: Williamson (1965), Mobley (1970), Charles Kraft (1979), and Whiteman (1983). One might question the need therefore for any further discussion on this matter since this specific horse has already been flogged to death. Since it all happened a century and a half ago, and now belongs to history, why beat a horse that is not only dead but was buried that long ago? Our purpose is not to engage in another backlashing of early missionaries. Nevertheless, an understanding of the missionary attitude towards Akan culture is necessary, for, it will provide us with an insight into the problem of split-level Christianity which has been bequeathed to the church.

There is an the Akan saying that *beebe a otomfo robo ho no na ho nsaa* which means "A blacksmith keeps hammering a particular spot because that particular spot has not become smooth." While much has been written and said on missionary attitudes to indigenous religion and culture, it is not yet

smooth—at least not where an understanding of split-level Christianity is concerned. Perhaps this is due to the fact identified in chapter two, that adequate attention has not been given to the role religion plays in society, which is one cause of the tenacity of traditional practices.

We discuss missionary attitude towards Akan religion not because we think every element in that religion is good. No culture is pure or without sin when evaluated in the light of the gospel of Christ. It must be pointed out that long before the missionaries sailed to Africa, the Africans had already worked out an elaborate cultural system of their own. They had their own religious creeds with theological sophistication, as well as developed art and music. They had also designed their own unique social system including those rites associated with the life cycle, medical practices, festivals, family and social structures revolving around kinship and inheritance. The Fantes have a saying, *bosompo botoo abo*, which means before the sea there was the rock. What is implied in this saying is that the Akan religion has been there long before Christianity.

The question is: How did the missionaries regard the culture they encountered? To take the question even further, what has been the attitude of the African Christians who have been influenced by the early missionaries? We will be more concerned in this section with the former question. The latter will be taken up in another section.

The missionaries at the outset were more pre-occupied with the task of church planting so that they had little time for any detailed study of the indigenous beliefs and practices. Again the general attitude of missionaries towards Akan religion and culture were not all that positive. Most aspects of the Akan life failed to make sense to them. A careful study of the journal (1968 published initially in 1844) of Thomas B. Freeman, the most important Methodist missionary figure in Ghana, reflects in many ways the common missionary attitude of his day. Particularly in his early years, Freeman saw violence and savagery as he looked at different Akan customs through the eyes of an English person. The following extracts from Freeman's journal during his visit to Ashanti amply demonstrate how his attitude towards the Akan religion was similar to the usual uncompromising approach of many of the nineteenth century missionaries:

Wednesday, 13th.- On my way to Fomunah on Sunday last, I saw the path literally strewed with offerings to Fetish; consisting of boiled eggs, beads, plantains, &c. This is the work of those wretched Fetishmen, whose employment is to impose on the ignorance of the people. (1968:22)

Saturday, 16th. - Upon my questioning them on the subject, they seem confident that it was just right for them to do so; but when I pointed out to them the folly of these heathenish observances, &c., they seemed convinced of it, and said their Fetishmen told them nonsense, and deceived them. (1968:23)

Sunday, 17th. - Blessed be the God, through whose good providence I was born in a Christian country! How amazing the difference between England and Ashanti! Here no village bell, sweetly sounding "across the daisied mead" invites the humble Christian to those of God! (Here it may be presumed) no hymn of praise ascends from the natives of this country to their

creator...May the happy day arrive when over this sanguinary country, the olive-wand of sacred peace shall triumphantly extended! (1968:24)

Wednesday, 20th. ...On their observing, they fear they would expose themselves to much danger, as a nation, by giving up their Fetish days, and keeping the Sabbath, I endeavored to convince them, that their fears were groundless, and that so far from bringing a curse upon the nation God will abundantly bless them; and referred to England as a proof of my assertion...(1968:33-34)

In some respects one can understand the missionaries, They had come to save the people from their culture which in those days and even today was regarded as primitive and inspired by satan. They could therefore not be expected to compromise with the traditional religion, otherwise what was the point in their coming over and preaching the gospel. Freeman's report in 1847 gives ample support for our position:

...in introducing Christianity among a semi-barbarous people, it is essentially necessary to guard against a merely English or European prejudice in favor of this or that kind of dress which, while it can have no connection with Christianity, may be.. a fruitful cause of evil." (Dickson 1977:15)

It is also fair to say that missionary attitudes were not altogether negative towards all aspects of Akan traditional beliefs. For example they appropriated for Christian usage the Akan name for the Supreme Being *Nyame* and titles associated with him. The Methodist also encouraged the use of Akan lyrics popularly called *ebindwom* during worship services. However they did not go far enough in incorporating aspects of the traditional culture into Christianity, since their primary task was to convert the people from their

traditional ways into Christianity.

It makes sense to say that missionaries came with pre-conceived ideas about Africans and their religions. Some of them were that Africans worshiped stones and trees, and that they were bound by the chains of satan. Some of these preconceptions were from stories they had heard about Africa. Southon, himself a Methodist missionary to Ghana, makes a point which amply confirms our position:

Rumors, based on tales of one or two intrepid explorers, of appalling orgies of bloodshed in Kumasi in which literally thousands of victims were offered in sacrifice, created the impression that African religion was essentially cruel because the African was savage in heart. The motives which led men like Dunwell, Harrop, Wrigley and others to volunteer for service on the Gold Coast were two fold; to offer the Gospel to the African as some passionate pity for the people regarded as debased and brutalized by gross superstition and wicked practices. With sublime courage and faith they came to lift up a nation out of a horrible pit, loathing the system of a religion which produced such abomination. (1934:45)

The negative attitude of the Methodist missionaries towards Akan culture is reflected in some of the nineteenth century hymns. Some stanzas of these hymns are words like:

From Greenland's icy mountains.
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain. (Methodist Hymn Book, 1933: 801)

O'er heathen lands afar
Thick darkness broodeth yet:
Arise O morning Star

Arise and never set. (Methodist Hymn Book, 1933: 811)

Ironically some of these hymns still appear in the Methodist Hymn Book used in Ghana today.

The tendency was to see everything overseas in terms of spiritual darkness. The fact is the missionaries did not have time to study Akan religion and culture in order to get a better understanding of them. Thus everything that was not readily understandable to them or had no rational basis was either rejected as of little significance or treated as superstition. This assertion is supported by S.G. Williamson a Methodist missionary to Ghana. In his perceptive study of Christianity among the Akans, Williamson argues that:

The primary task of the missionary among Akan was, as he saw it, the destruction of traditional superstition and the implantation of the Christian faith. The fetish was said to be a thing of nought, and efforts were made to discredit it in the eyes of the people. (1965:54)

Victor Turner (1969:2) observes such views of missionaries parallels that of the anthropologists like Lewis Morgan especially "all primitive religions are grotesque and some extent unintelligible"

The missionaries launched an attack on the Akan traditional religion. The most notable example of this attack is the famous Mankessim case in 1851 in which the Fante national shrine known as *Nanaanom Pow* was attacked and its priests arrested, tried, and punished by the colonial administration. The Methodist Mission was a player in this crusade against the Fante shrine.

Several versions of the incident at *Nanaanom Pow* are told. Mr. J.B. Crayner who has done a thorough study on this subject confirmed with me in an interview that the attack on this fetish grove began when a hunter at Asaafa by the name of Akweesi who had been converted to Christianity (Methodism) gathered around him some converts at Obidan where the fetish grove is situated. In hopes of setting up a tent, Akweesi went to the sacred grove to cut down a tree. Cutting a tree from this sacred grove was a taboo. Akweesi and the Christians at Obidan suffered great persecution in the hands of the priests and traditional authorities. Eventually the Methodist Mission and the colonial administration had to intervene. The priests of the shrine were brought to trial. Some of them were said to have confessed that many of the activities that went on in the shrine were deceitful. The grove has since this incident been desacralized with many of the thick trees cut down.²⁵

To ensure a complete break with the old religion the missionaries encouraged the burning of traditional religious relics. Converts were encouraged to bring out their magic talisman (*juju*) which they obtained from traditional medicine men for destruction by fire. The aim was to sever any links from idolatry. Perhaps instead of destroying these items they could have been collected, preserved and kept in museums as monuments.

The missionaries were very much influenced by the prevailing evolutionary ideas which regarded African people and cultures as primitive. Taber has observed that:

Coupled with antecedent theological ideas such as the doctrines of original sin and the indispensability of Jesus Christ for salvation, this attitude led to a harshly negative interpretation of the religions of non-Westerners as "heathen" "pagan" or "demonic." This judgement was reinforced by the dominant ideas, that non-Western cultures were inferior to Western civilization, were "barbarian," or "savage" and that non-Western persons were inferior to Western persons. (1991:72)

Taber's general observation here about the early missionaries is true of the missionaries who came to Ghana. The missionaries saw as their task replacing the indigenous religion with Christianity. To become a Christian meant abandoning the traditional culture, including one's African name, and adopting a Western or "Christian name." Many Akan Christians today have two names, the traditional one given during the naming ceremony and the Western or "Christian" name given during baptism. One will question the need to replace traditional names with Western or biblical names considering the fact that many Christian in the West do not have such biblical names.

Some Akans were very suspicious about the missionaries. The Asantehene Mensah Bonsu in 1876 is reported to have told the Rev. Thomas Picot a Methodist missionary that:

The Bible is not a book for us. God at the beginning gave the Bible to the White people, and another book to the Cramos (Muhammendans), and fetish to us... We know God already. We will never embrace your religion, for it would make our people proud. It is your religion which has ruined the Fante country, weakened their power and brought down the high man on a level with the low man. (Findlay and Holdsworth 1922:175)

Converts' Participation in Akan Traditional Life

There appears to have been a tendency on the part of the missionaries to discourage Akan Christians to participate in the traditional life of their people. As Dickson (1977:195) observes "there was the tendency to link the Christian message of new life to the necessity that converts separate themselves from their traditional practices." What the missionaries did not readily understand was the interrelationship between Akan traditional beliefs and their daily lives most of which lie outside the church. To ensure that converts grow in their Christian faith, they were encouraged to avoid all kinds of traditional practices.

Some of the catalogue of things in which members of the church were forbidden from participation were enshrined in the Constitution and Standing Orders (S.O.) of the Methodist Church. For example:

1. All married members shall obey the Christian rule of life-long monogamous fidelity in marriage, and shall be exhorted to seek blessings of their marriage in Church (S.O.542:3d).
2. Members of the church shall not enter into polygamous marriage or encourage such marriages for their dependents and children (S.O.542.3l).
3. There shall be no drumming at a member's wake-keeping (S.O.548.3)

It must be noted that the attitude of the church towards traditional practices has not changed much even under indigenous leadership. A notable example is during the celebration of the birth of the Ghana Republic in 1960.

The chairman of the Methodist Church turned down an invitation to attend the celebration because he could not accept the validity of the libation prayer that would be offered because it was against the teaching of the church (Bartels 1965:230).

The point being made here is not whether these regulations conform to Christian standards, but how the policies pursued by the church tended to alienate people from their traditional culture. Again, we are not endorsing every aspect of the traditional culture because no culture including that of the West, remains pure; it has some inherent sinfulness. The problem here is the way Christianity was often interpreted in terms of Western culture, and most aspects of Akan culture were seen as sinful.

The Basel (Presbyterian) mission even went to the extent of physically separating the Christians from their people by encouraging them to live in separate quarters known as "Salem". In a sense these "salems" posed a threat to the chiefs. Evidently they were being faithful to the scriptures in 2 Corinthians 2:17 which enjoins believers to be separated from unbelievers. The negative attitude of the missionaries towards Akan culture received criticism from traditional rulers like Nana Ofori-Atta who sent a memorandum on this to the Synod of the Presbyterian Church (Mobley 1970:76-77).

The Methodist missionaries pursued a similar policy. In their case isolationism was in the form of building chapels and mission houses on the outskirts of towns and villages. The implication of this is evident; converts or

believers were to come out or be separated from the heathen. Bartels (1965:70) drives this point home by observing that Rev. Freeman in his educational plans advocated for a Christian community inaccessible to heathen influence. Freeman was able to achieve this at Beulah where he established a Christian community. Dr. Agbeti, Ghanaian church historian, also confirmed with me in an interview that among the Toms of Bator in the Eastern part of Ghana, the Methodist compounds were known as *Kpodzi* which implies Christian quarters.

Evidently such policies were pursued to keep the Akan Christians pure and uncontaminated by "heathen" practices. There was a tendency among converts to regard themselves as different from their own people. Christians were and are still called *Nyamesomfo* (worshippers of God) and non-Christians or church members were called *Wiadzefo* (people of the world). An impression was therefore created that to become a Christian meant turning away completely from their culture. As Busia (1951:133-34) observed in Ashanti most people who became Christians regarded themselves as a separate community under the authority of the European missionary who was the head of the church and not the local chief. Thus when in 1905, the Basel missionaries were seeking to return to Ashanti the chiefs were "afraid to encourage a movement that experience tells them will in the course of time undermine their power."

The Bible and the Plough

The missionary aim at the time was not only to Christianize the African but to civilize them as well. This policy popularly known as the "Bible and the Plough" was enunciated by the pietistic evangelicals and humanitarians who were concerned to make atonement for the slave trade by good works for national life and charity towards humankind, particularly the underdogs. The way of atonement was two-fold: evangelization and civilizing them. As Pobee explains:

The "Bible" stood not only for the introduction of Christianity but also for education, for the skills to develop the individual and the community. "The plough" signified the effort to develop and explore their national resources rather than sell one another. (1991:44)

It could be said that Methodist Missionaries also pursued this policy. A statement attributed to the Wesleyan Missionary Society during Freeman's visit to Britain with his African assistant missionary, William de Graft, concerning the mission's objective in the Gold Coast (Ghana) amply support our assertion:

Mr. Freeman hopes to return to the scene of his evangelical labors, accompanied by six other missionaries, in the glorious enterprise of attempting to establish a mission among the four million of men, who constitute the population of the powerful Ashanti, and its dependencies; and thus to introduce Christianity, education, and civilization into one important portion of that great continent, to which Britain owes so vast a debt of reparation, for the wrongs and miseries of the accursed slave trade. (Freeman 1968:86)

Missionary Communication

There appears to have been a communication gap between the Methodist missionaries and the indigenous people. Several aspects of the missionary life and work confirms this point. We note in the first place that the missionaries found it easier to communicate to the people through African interpreters, rather than learning the local language.

Freeman himself, the chief architect of the mission, did poorly in this area. He lived for about fifty years in Ghana and never gave a single address in Fante. One would wonder how much of the missionaries' preaching was actually understood by the people. On the question of language learning, Wrigley was an exception. Bartels (1965:25) says that in the brief period of his stay he learned the Fante language and preached in it. The Basel missionaries did better at language learning than did their Methodist counterparts. The Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society did not give any thought to training in the local language until the 1950s. A report of a secretarial visit to West Africa substantiates this:

It is the judgement of many missionaries that a period of in-service training during furlough, especially the first furlough, is as important as pre-service training. This is certainly true of the first West Africa furlough when the first year and half of service has not included the discipline of the language school of the Eastern area. (Methodist Missionary Society Report 1953-1954:31)

The report further stressed the need for the Missionary Committee for missionaries in West Africa to take the question of language learning much more serious.

We must not underestimate the importance of communicating to a person in his or her own language. The missionaries could have done better if they had communicated in the Fante language rather than through interpreters. Evidently their message was expressed in Western communication patterns and there is the likelihood that some of it was not understood by the indigenous people.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the missionaries' communication which cannot escape our attention is that the mode in which the biblical message was conveyed. The worship practice introduced by the missionaries did not take the cultic background or the spiritual temperament of the people into serious consideration. There was very little emphasis on ritual. This could be said of most Protestant missionaries.

We will recall in our discussion on Akan traditional beliefs and practices that Akans come from a background in which rituals play a strong role. A worship pattern that places little emphasis on rituals was not likely to make the people feel at home. Could we say then that the missionaries were trying to fit a square peg in a round hole? One observes that any worship pattern like that of the Catholic Church which places emphasis on ritual with its high and sensual attention to decoration, color, and even smell is more appealing to the African temperament than the drabber worship of protestantism.

There was surely a communication gap between the Methodist missionaries and the Akans. What John V. Taylor says about the way the

Gospel of Jesus Christ has been presented in Africa is very true of Ghana.

Christ has been presented as the answer to a question a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that western man would feel, the Savior of the world of European world-view, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. (1963:16)

The issue is more than a question of efficiency of communication but how the gospel message reached the heart and mind of the Akan. It appears that Christianity was presented to the Akan in a style and form associated with the cultural background of the messengers. The missionaries showed a lack of understanding of the religio-cultural life of the Akans to whom the gospel was being communicated and assumed that Western models and styles were universally applicable.

It would be unfair to assess or criticize the work of the early missionaries only from the perspective of the post colonial era with our knowledge now informed by the social sciences. We are not trying to assess blame in any way, but to analyze the causes of spirit-level Christianity and seek a cure. But it must also be observed that the missionaries had the example of the early apostles like Paul who were also engaged in mission to cultures other than the Jewish faith. Could the missionaries have followed the example of their predecessors or the Saints who have gone before them? In Paul's mission to the Gentiles, he made use of a common point of contact, beginning from nature and natural religion (Acts 17). In other words he began from what the people knew and moved to what they did not know rather than levelling outright condemnation at what the people already had in their

religion. How about if the missionaries' message had been "Him whom you worship as distant, we proclaim to you as near?" Again taking cognizance of Akan belief in gods, ancestors, and the spirits, Christ could have been proclaimed as the all sufficient mediator, between God and humans, and the victor over all evil powers. But as Wright comments in his introduction to Freeman's journal:

One finds in his journal, especially in its early stages, the usual uncompromising approach of mid-nineteenth century missionaries to pagan populations; salvation demands exact adherence to the words of Christ, the sabbath must be rigidly observed; theological intricacies must be properly accepted; non Christian practices are sinful and must be stopped. (Freeman 1968:xxix)

It must also be said that as far as the history of Christian mission is concerned, the early missionaries to Ghana were not the first to carry the gospel across other cultures. The missionaries also had before them the example of the early church fathers, who were similarly engaged in the spread of the gospel in the Graeco-Roman world. In both instances there were attempts to relate the Christian faith to the new culture demonstrating the adaptability of the Christian faith to any cultural context. This perhaps should be the yard stick for assessing their work as far as their attitude towards African culture is concerned.

Imposition of Western Culture

A major problem widely acknowledged was the popular equation of Christianity with Western culture and civilization. The early missionaries were seldom able to detach their cultural particularities from the gospel. Western culture was thought to be the embodiment of Christian values. This aspect of missionary methods has led to the charge that has been brought against the missionary movement, that it was another attempt to universalize something which is profoundly particular and parochial, namely Western civilization (Shenk 1990:186). As Williamson has noted:

The invitation to accept the Christian religion was also a call to participate in a Western interpretation of reality. Thus converts were not only merely required to abandon the worship of many gods for the worship of One God, but were taught to look at traditional religion as the worship of nonentities. The missionary enterprise was seeking to implant its Christianity by the method of substituting for the Akan world view what was a European world view. (1965:171)

One may conclude that the Western missionary enterprise in Ghana in some respects was a "Westernizing" enterprise instead of solely a "Christianizing" venture. It is a matter of conjecture whether the missionaries were aware or not of how far they were promoting their own Western culture. The missionaries, nevertheless, deserve to be given the benefit of any doubt.

The situation in Ghana is somehow different from that of the Southern part of Africa in which Africans were given the Bible and while they were reading it "they took away our land."²⁶ The Church is viewed with favor rather than as a disruptive agency. The major criticism of the missionaries has

been that in introducing Christianity, the Akan was made to adopt certain aspects of Western culture which were not necessarily Christian. For example, one was required to dress like a Westerner before mounting a Methodist pulpit to preach. One must normally wear a coat and tie. A well known case in Ghana is Dr Ephraim Amoo a Ghanian musicologist who was not allowed to preach because he was wearing a traditional cloth. There is the case of a Presbyterian minister who was refused ordination because he was unwilling to put on a black suit. This pastor, who had completed his theological training, eventually withdrew from the ministry.²⁷ Mobley has rightly pointed out that:

The inevitable application of western concepts resulted in the formation of Western institutions "as in England." Without a proper understanding of the indigenous religions, the missionary proceeded to introduce western rites, ceremony, and art. Marriage and funeral customs were foisted upon the Christian converts...The missionary came with his hymnbook, Geneva gown and cross. He failed to recognize the value of the material objects associated with traditional worship. (1970:155)

It is evident that the missionaries actively sought to introduce "superior" Western cultural norms in their attempts to Christianize Africa. For an African to respond to the Christian message means breaking in some degree from his or her group. The attempt to introduce Western culture created problems. Among the Akans as in most other African societies, social, religious, political and economic systems are such an integrated whole that any attempt to change one aspect would naturally affect the others. Saayman (1991:31) has compared the African cultural system with the image of a

spider's web in which any contact with one strand of the web sets the whole web quivering.

There are several examples of this imposition of Western culture and morality in missionary practice. A typical example is the case of a young minister against whom a charge of pre-marital co-habitation was brought because it was discovered that he had known his wife before the church wedding took place. He was accordingly threatened with dismissal from the ministry of the church. But for the intervention of some senior African pastors the young man would have been refused ordination. This implies that Akan customary marriage was not recognized by the missionaries. But before any Akan couple present themselves for a church wedding, they have already been pronounced as husband and wife in the traditional way through the traditional marriage rite.

Another example of the imposition of Western culture was the practice of not allowing polygamists as full members of the church. Polygamists were denied access to the Lord's Supper, and full Christian burial, though their financial contributions were gladly welcomed. A famous incident occurred at Gomoa Brofo where a benevolent member of the church who had built a chapel for the church was refused full burial because he was a polygamist. This resulted in a vehement opposition by the family members of the deceased who threatened to demolish the chapel. The church was forced to conduct a full Christian burial.²⁸ Many of the missionary prohibitions are still enforced

by the Methodist Church now under indigenous leadership. Dickson (1976:178) cites the case in 1972 at Cape Coast where the Methodist Church refused to hold a Thanksgiving Service for a departed member because there had been drumming in connection with the winding up of the funeral obsequies. The point here is not affirm that polygamy is valid practice, but whether the church is justified in its attitude towards them.

The bottom line of this attempt to impose Western culture on the people was that the gospel was not presented with as much relevancy as it deserved. Today many converts maintain double standards because of their incapacity to adapt themselves to the standards of the missionaries. Thus many Akan Christians live "split-level" lives--one level being Christian and the other level remaining traditional. The African Christian therefore suffers from a form of religious schizophrenia. Bishop Tutu has observed a similar situation in South Africa when he says that:

The African Christian has... been compelled to pay lip service to Christianity as understood, expressed and preached by the white man. But with an ever greater part of himself, a part he has been often ashamed to acknowledge openly and which he has struggled to repress, he has felt that his Africaness was being violated. (1979:366)

The theological problems that have resulted from this attempt to impose Western culture upon African people need to be recognized in order to understand the concerns of African theological debate in this post-missionary era. Arising out of all this is the need to contextualize Christianity, to make it relevant to the Akan. The Methodist Church like many other churches has

been well established among the Akans, but Christianity has not been adequately integrated into the daily lives of the people.

This chapter has shown that missionaries did not encourage the indigenous expression of the Christian faith which could have gone a long way toward making the Christian faith firmly rooted in the Akan soil. Williamson makes a similar argument that:

The Akan became a Christian by cleaving to the new order introduced by the missionaries rather than by working out his salvation within the traditional religious milieu...The result has been that Christianity has proved unable to sympathize with or relate its message spiritually to Akan spiritual outlook; its impact is thereby dulled. (1965:170-175)

Christianity appears to have had less transforming effect on the daily lives and activities of the people, connected with marriage, birth, death, etc.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the early Methodist missionary activities in Ghana, particularly among the Akans. We have devoted much attention to the missionary life and work as well as their attitude toward Akan traditional religion and culture. This may appear to be a rather negative evaluation of the early missionary work, but the purpose, however, has been to find out those aspects of the early missionary work which help us understand the legacy of split-level Christianity with which the church has been left.

It is clear from this discussion that Methodism was planted in Ghana due to the dedicated efforts of the early missionary pioneers. Before the first

missionary ever set foot on Ghanaian soil, however, the place had already been prepared for Methodism by indigenous people wanting to know more about Christianity. The mission's goal was conversion of Akans to the Christian faith; in order to achieve that goal missionaries adopted a rather negative attitude towards the Akan religion and culture. This attitude in turn prevented them from developing a culturally relevant church.

Judging from some of the attitudes of the early missionaries, one hesitates to pay glowing tributes to some of their methods employed in christianizing the Akans. To the contrary one tends to blame them for the glaring loopholes in their strategy. The missionary view of Akan religion opens the way for a fresh approach to understanding the relationship of Christian faith to the Akan religion. This leads to our next chapter where we will discuss some of the factors that may help to account for the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices among many Akan converts to the Methodist Church.

End Notes

1. For a general history of Methodism in Ghana cf. F. L. Bartels (1965), *The Roots of Methodism in Ghana* and A. E. Southon (1934) *Gold Coast Methodism*.
2. Some missionary activity had begun earlier in the eighteenth century under the Portuguese influence but that had no abiding christianizing effect. Again European forts established along the coast normally included the provision of a chaplain, and some merchants both practiced their Christian faith and gave Christian instructions immediately attendant upon them.
3. The Anglican Church had established its presence since the early days of British occupancy and enjoyed a monopoly of chaplaincy at the forts.

4. Thompson could be described as a controversial person. He recorded his impressions in a journal *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, published in 1758. He saw no evil in the slavery and wrote approvingly of the slave trade. He however urged the necessity of developing the Fante language and encouraged education (Sanneh 1983:243-8).

5. Freeman gives an interesting account of their meetings. On Sunday they met in the house of one of their number at a very early hour, sometimes as early as two o'clock. After singing one or two psalms they read some of the prayers in the liturgy of the Church of England. A portion of scripture was then read by the most competent person and explained in the Fante language, after which they concluded the service by singing part of another psalm and used another prayer from the liturgy (Cited in Bartels 1965:8).

6. Dunwell was able to bring the two groups together when he arrived as the first missionary (Bartels 1965:13).

7. Smith had reported De Graft to the governor. Without much investigation on the matter, the governor imposed a heavy fine on him and imprisoned him (Bartels (1965:15).

8. Buxton was one of the leaders who called for the abolition of the slave trade. He took over the leadership of the campaign against slavery from William Wilberforce in 1822.

9. Earlier churches had also aided the preparation; particularly Philip Quarcoe and Thompson of the Anglican Church who had worked as chaplains at the Cape Coast castle. Capitein of the Dutch Reformed Church, and French and Portuguese Catholic priests had watered the soil for the seed of Methodism to be sown.

10. Underneath the pulpit of the Wesley Church, Cape Coast, the premier Methodist Church in Ghana, lie the bodies of the first five missionaries; Dunwell, Mr & Mrs Wrigley, and Mr & Mrs Harrop who came to serve the church in Ghana.

11. The journal which Freeman kept during this trip made him a well-known figure in missionary circles. It was sent home with a message of approbation from Governor George Maclean and was first published in full by the Missionary Society monthly periodical in 1840.

12. Obviously the churches had relied on the schools to do their Christian education for them. It therefore became a blow for the church when after independence in 1957 the government took over the control of the schools by church bodies and now allowed for other religions to be taught.

13. Farming was the chief occupation of the people in those days and remains so even to this day.
14. The author himself was first introduced to Christianity through a Methodist mission school and has remained a Methodist.
15. The institution was later transferred to Cape Coast when Shipman died February 2, 1843.
16. A letter by one of the missionaries, Rev. Mr. Watkins, in September 10, 1843 noted that the two older men among the group of those training at the Institution "can pray with tolerable ease and fluency in the English."
17. In a letter written in 1842 Shipman reveals the nature of the plan of work he had devised for the young men in training. The day's work consisted of family prayers, followed by translation from English into Fante. Next came English grammar and the study of Wesley sermons. "From it I endeavored plainly and familiarly to explain and prove to them our doctrine, and to answer such queries as they make respecting them." (cited in Dickson 1976:169)
18. Akan society is divided into traditional areas each under a Paramount Chief. The residence of the Superintendent minister in a town other than the traditional seat of government was often interpreted by some church members of a particular town as owing allegiance to the church in the town where the minister resides.
19. For detail discussion on the relationship of mission and colonialism see Roland Oliver (1956) and Stephen Neil (1966)
20. A considerable amount of books and articles have appeared on the African Independent Churches. Among them are Christian Baeta (1962), *Prophetism in Ghana: A Case Study of Spiritual Churches*; B.G.M. Sundkler (1961) *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*; David Barrett (1968) *Schism and Renewal in Africa*; See also the more recent book by G. C. Oosthuizen (1992) *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*.
21. A letter from the President of the church, Prof. Kwesi Dickson, to the synods of the church in 1990 gave much attention to this matter.
22. Lamin Sanneh (1989) has discussed this in detail.
23. Some of the African Independent Churches like the Musama Disco Christo Church (M.D.C.C.) permit the practice of polygamy.

24. In Ghana there is a Good News Training Institute under the auspices of the Mennonite Church which seeks to give theological education to the leaders of these churches.

25. Interview with Mr J. B. Crayner April 11, 1993. The original cassette of the interview is in the possession of the writer.

26. The Fantes fought successfully against earlier colonial attempts to control their land by forming the Aborigines Right Protection Society in the 1860s to protest against any such attempt on the part of the British colonial authority through the introduction of a Lands Bill.

27. My investigation of this incident reveals that this particular person was allergic to black things hence, he could not wear a black suit for the ordination which the tradition of the church requires, but the church authorities would not compromise on the issue.

28. The practice of the Church had been to conduct the funeral service at the home of the deceased instead of in the chapel. When it was time for burial the coffin is carried round the church building. This practice was known as *Hwe me tower* which literally mean "look at the church tower." Fortunately this rule has changed. Polygamists are now given full Christian burial but they are still not permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper.

CHAPTER 5

Why Akan Beliefs and Practices Persist

A critical issue that any student of religion in Africa must come to grips with is the continuing vitality of indigenous African religions in the face of the impact of Christianity and Islam. One observes traditional religious beliefs and practices have not gone with the wind of socio-cultural changes that have blown across the African continent over the past century. Traditional religion has remained tenacious and shows vitality everywhere.

It is these traditional beliefs and practices which missionaries wanted the people to abandon for Christianity. But it appears that the church has not been successful in getting people to completely abandon the traditional beliefs and practices. Many church members continue to indulge in them, albeit clandestinely, for fear of church rebuke. This is the darker side of the story of the church in Africa often neglected or not reported in church growth surveys. Although Christianity is experiencing a phenomenal growth, traditional religion still exerts some influence in the lives of many church members. One is inclined to say that Christianization of the Akans has only meant some external acceptance of the Christian faith while the religious worldview has remained unchanged.

The problem of church members reverting on certain occasions to traditional beliefs and practices has been a problem with which the church has lived for a long time. As late as 1955 a conference by the Christian Council of

Ghana observed this problem. Dr. K. A. Busia one of the organizers of this conferences reports that:

After a long discussion and frank exchange of views and experiences, the participants agreed with remarkable unanimity that certain practices which were contrary to Christian belief and teaching continued among Christians, and that in some instances there was a return to traditional observances, particularly at such critical moments of life as birth, illness, grave misfortune or death. (1961:80)

Little progress has been made since 1955 and the problem is still with the church. There is a preponderance of evidence that traditional beliefs and practices persist among church members. Some of this evidence can be observed by what one reads in the Ghanaian newspapers or hears on the radio. Here one always notices a funeral announcement in the obituary section which reads almost like:

Nana ... Ebusuapanyin of Aburadze royal family announces the death of their beloved ...which sad event occurred on May 17, 1993. Funeral arrangements are as follows:

Wakekeeping: May 30 at House No D.41 Royal Street, Mankessim

Burial and Thanksgiving Service: Ebenezer Methodist Church, followed by Family-gathering and traditional rites at the deceased's residence.

Another evidence that traditional religion is alive and well among the people is the proliferation of traditional priest healers all across the country. Any casual observer driving or walking through the cities and countryside cannot fail to notice the numerous signboards pointing to the presence of these

people and the various disease, ailments, and problems they counter or treat. These traditional healers have their own professional associations which is recognized by the government. They provide their members with identity cards and diplomas which are often displayed in their place of operation. The activities of these traditional healers are sponsored by people including church members who go to them to seek various kinds of help.

The persistence of Akan traditional religion is also found among Muslims. Islam has always sought to replace African traditional institutions with Islamic ones. But even where Islam succeeded in replacing political institutions with Islamic ones, as in some parts of Northern Ghana, a total break with the past has not been possible for many Africans.¹

It could well be argued that the lively persistence of traditional religion is an indication that the Christian faith as a potted plant is yet to take a firm root in the African soil. The Akan society affords a field laboratory situation to test the impact of the introduction of Christianity and Western Culture. To obtain data that will help to answer our research problem, I conducted a field work from March to June 1992. Our research has comprised three parts:

1. Ethnographic information on the Akan traditional religion.
2. Examination of missionary and church documents. This was intended to obtain information about early missionary activities as well as how the present church is conducting its ministry among the Akans.
3. Personal observation and interviews to find out the extent of the influence of

the traditional religion among the members of the church. Sixty members of the church and thirty pastors were selected for interview. For example, I asked questions about what they think about witchcraft, witches, spirits, and ancestors (see appendix for interview schedule). Our findings revealed ample evidence of the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices among members of the church. We present in this chapter the results of our findings. We have identified certain factors that may account for the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices. In my evaluation of the problem I have also drawn some insights from the findings of other social scientists who have studied the Akans.

The problem encountered in the study has to do with probing the religious and private lives of people which proved to be an extraordinarily difficult task. People were often less open to discuss what belongs to their private lives. Church members who hold double allegiance do not want to be perceived as unfaithful; they always want to give a good impression about themselves. Nevertheless the good rapport created enabled me to obtain the relevant information from the respondents.

We must begin by saying that the impact of Christianity has resulted in some cultural change, but the extent of those changes must not be exaggerated. The study gives sufficient evidence of a people influenced by traditional beliefs and practices. The tenacity of traditional beliefs and practices is more observed during events associated with the life cycle such as birth, puberty,

marriage and death, Among the Akans, various rituals and ceremonies punctuate these phases of human life or rites of passage. The table below sustains this position.

Table 1

Respondents' Participation in Traditional Practices

	Number Interviewed	Yes	No
Birth	60	80%	20%
Puberty	60	30%	70%
Marriage	60	80%	20%
Funeral	60	100%	0%
Libation	60	80%	20%

One can infer from the table above that an overwhelming proportion of respondents do participate in traditional rites connected with birth, marriage, funeral and libation. People are however less engaged in traditional puberty rites. Our observation of the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices tallies with what Busia had observed in a study carried out in Ghana long ago:

As one watches the daily lives and activities of the people, and takes into account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvest or installation to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities, and for all their influence, the Christian churches, are still alien institutions, but not integrated with social institutions. (1950:79)

The data suggests the conclusion that many members of the church still observe traditional practices associated with death, and marriage rites. They

go through those traditional rites in much the same way as the non-Christian. Of the 20 women interviewed who have experienced the death of a spouse, 19 of them stated they went through the traditional widowhood rite or *kunaye* in one form or another.

An incident in a particular town where I was serving as a minister in 1982 illustrates how traditional beliefs persists among church members. This town has a famous market and most of the inhabitants depends on the market for their livelihood. It happened that business began to slow down at the market with many of the market women losing much of their business. The chief and the elders consulted a diviner who suggested that the gods had been offended.

The only way the gods could be appeased and things returned to normal was by a communal sacrifice. All the members of the communities were asked to make a contribution towards the purchase of a cow to be used as a sacrifice. An effort by one pastor to discourage his members from making those contribution resulted in a serious clash with the traditional authorities. To my surprise most of the members of my church made their contribution and were part of the ceremonial sacrifice.

Traditional beliefs and practices persist not only among the rural and illiterate folks but among urban and intellectual folks as well. The incident at the University of Ghana in 1970 which we have cited earlier (p.8) amply supports our position.

Some traditional healers I talked to indicated that some of their clients were members of the church. Again, several of my informants categorically affirmed that they knew of some members of the church including some church leaders who visit the traditional healers. Margaret Field made a similar observation several years ago:

It is not possible to know what proportion of the ordinary supplicants at the shrine are Christians, for they seldom mention this unless the priest inquires... And not only do unsophisticated illiterates or semi-literate Christians come to the shrines; I have met there training college teachers, lawyers, members of the legislative assembly and some of the most highly educated men in the country. (1960:54)

Field further affirms that Christians and church leaders and teachers consult shrines that are some distance away from their home in order to conceal their visits (1960:54). These traditional shrines operated by traditional priests and healers are consulted particularly during times of crisis, such as illness and death.

Persistence of Traditional Medical Practices

One area in which the traditional system has been more tenacious is the practice of traditional medicine in the face of modern medicine. Most people including Christians regularly use Western medicines, but along with these many will also continue to rely on the traditional healing practice. Eighty percent of the church members interviewed indicated they have engaged in traditional medical practice. People resort to traditional medical practitioners

because their practice is consonant with their worldview which attributes the cause of some diseases to supernatural factors rather than to germ theory. Such diseases are regarded as *sunsum mu yareba* meaning spiritual illness. In such situations people resort to a traditional healer who will use magico-religious means as part of the treatment.

The fact that people persist in using traditional healing methods in the face of the existence of hospitals and clinics is an indication that Western medicine does not fully meet what the people discern to be their medical needs. An informant told me an incident about a son declared hopeless at the nation's famous hospital (Korle Bu). Doctors attending to her son advised her to take him home.² The patient was taken to one of the traditional healers who diagnosed the disease as *sunsum mu yareba* (spiritual illness) and prescribed an appropriate remedy. The patient later recovered. The parent in question was a church member.

Elsewhere Dr. Evans-Anfom a renowned Ghanaian medical practitioner and educator has made similar observations of people resorting to the traditional medical system. Evans-Anfom (1986) cites various cases he has observed in his medical practices where people have resorted to the use of traditional medicine. One of the cases involved a 35-year old Ghanaian in a senior position in the Civil Service who suddenly became ill. For the rest of the story I will enable Evans-Anfom to speak for himself:

Out of the blue there was a noticeable change in his behavior and he started having some hallucinations. In no time his personality had deteriorated considerably and it was at this point that his wife brought him to see me. I was shocked to see the change in him. He had got to the stage which, as a mere surgeon, I could not adequately handle. I therefore gave him a letter to see a psychiatrist at Accra. After about one month he came back to all intents and purposes cured. He was once again in his genial old self. But this supposed cure turned out to be a mere remission. He had a severe relapse within a month and was taken to some village near Sekondi-Takoradi to undergo a "native" treatment. Within two weeks he was back to work cured once again. By the time I left on transfer nine months later he was still well. (1986:24)

According to Evans-Anfom the traditional practitioner who treated this person diagnosed the illness as having been caused by a colleague in his office who used "juju" to make him insane so that he would be inactive to perform his duties, thus giving a chance for his colleague to be promoted to his position. An impressive ritual of exorcism was performed whose psychotherapeutic effect was dramatic.

The patient in question according Evans-Anfom had a high level of education but he believed strongly in the suggestion made to him by the practitioners. He also believed in the ritual performance meant to successfully neutralize the "juju." My research uncovered several cases of this nature where people have reverted to traditional medical practice when western medicine has failed to effect a cure of a particular illness.

Evans-Anfom (1986:22) cites another case where a four-year old boy suffering from acute glomerulo, (inflammatory condition of the kidney) was admitted at the hospital. After a few days treatment, the boy began to show

signs of recovery. Surprisingly, the boy's parents requested to take him home for "native" treatment. The parents had been told by a diviner that the cause of the child's illness was their failure to perform rituals associated with twins. According to Evans-Anfom there are several instances where patients have been discharged by relatives from the hospitals against medical advice so they could receive traditional treatment.

Traditional healers concern themselves not only with physical ailment but with all aspects of life, treating, what the Akan will call *asetseɲa mu nsem* (life crises). For example women having marital problems go to them for charms to maintain their marital union. Others seek help from them in order to be successful in life and in their business. Some of them claim to have charms for obtaining money or *sika dur*. Some business people, particularly traders who want to get rich quickly, consult them.

Having demonstrated that traditional beliefs and practices are alive and well among many Akan Christians we now proceed to discuss some of the factors that have led to the persistence of those beliefs and practices. We observe that the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices has remote and immediate causes. Some of the remote causes have to do with how Christianity was introduced by the missionaries and adopted by the Akans. Immediate causes will include how the church today is carrying out its mission among the Akans.

Motives for Joining the Church

Since we are concerned primarily with those who are members of the church and call themselves Christians, it will be appropriate at this juncture to discuss some factors that have led people to become members of the church. Our purpose here is to show that traditional beliefs and practices persist among church members because many have joined the church for reasons other than a genuine desire or conviction to give up the old religion for the new faith. From the very beginning of the introduction of Christianity to this time, many Akans have joined the church for various reasons. The following can be identified as some of the reasons:

(a) Christianity as symbol of Western civilization: From the very beginning of its introduction, the church has been identified as a symbol of Western civilization and culture which many people uncritically accepted and were eager to copy particularly during the heyday of colonialism. Many aspects of Western culture hold appeal for many people. Again because Christianity was associated with the Whiteman-Kwesi Bronyi-whom the Akans initially admired, it also received a favorable reception. Thus western civilization and the Akan perception of the white man did predispose the Akan to be open to the missionary message. Lystad has made a similar observation:

The church has succeeded because it is part of the larger Western culture, much of which the Ashanti want to appropriate for themselves. It is part of all those aspects of the Western way of life which hold some appeal to the people of Ashanti: schools, new occupation, travel and education abroad, science and

medicine ... new greater wealth and new avenues to prestige.
(1968:185)

It could be said that many joined the church because of the prestige and advantages it provided, and not because they were absolutely convinced of the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Again the Akans are generally religious and this makes them open to the gospel or religious matters. The general belief in *Nyame* (creator God) predisposes them to consider joining the church. We have earlier noted that it was this Akan name for God which the missionaries used in their preaching.

The mission schools established by the church as part of its evangelistic methods were a powerful inducement to church membership. Church membership may get the children admitted to school, or better still if a village wanted a school, establishment of a church was a quick way of getting it. In some ways this method of evangelism might have been counterproductive but it did initially open doors.

(b) Expectation of Power: Among the Akans there is the tendency to try any religious system for its power in solving problems. Initially Christianity was seen as powerful. Many joined the church because they thought they would find in the church the ultimate solutions to their existential problems such as sickness, witchcraft, success and failure in life. But in the end they could not see the Christian God to be all that potent. Such people readily revert to the old religion for answers to their problems while continuing to maintain their membership in the church.

(c) Christian Burial: The desire to have a Christian burial is another reason for people joining the church. The Akan looks forward to having a good funeral when life's journey is over. Christian burial is admired by many who find it fulfills their expectations of a good funeral. In my ministry I have had the experience of family members coming to plead for a Christian burial for their dead relatives even though the deceased persons were not active members of the church. Again, having a church or Christian burial is also wrongly interpreted as a passport to heaven.

Lack of Adequate Instructions

Lack of adequate instructions about the Christian faith can be identified as one of the factors leading to the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices. Our observation of the way people are received into the church leads us to conclude that people do not receive adequate instruction about the Christian faith before and after they are admitted into the church.

Many have been confirmed and received as full members of the church and yet they lack understanding of the basic elements of the Christian faith. Preparations of candidates for confirmation are usually done by lay persons. The course of instruction normally consists of learning the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, some Scripture passages, and the responses in the liturgy. Candidates must be able to recite them as a proof that they are ready to be confirmed and received into full membership of the church.

The church has not designed adequate study materials for confirmation candidates. The confirmation service confers full membership status on people and candidates receive their first communion during the service. People often regard the confirmation as a form of graduation service from Christian teaching. There are often no follow-up lessons for these new members aimed at helping them to become fully grounded in the Christian faith. The lack of adequate instruction could be one cause of the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices, and so people do not fully understand the implication of the Christian faith for their lives.

The Role of Religion in Akan Society

Traditional religion has undergirded the Akan society in remarkable ways. It had served some important functions before Christianity was introduced and continues to do so today. This is more so in traditional healing practices, in which traditional beliefs play a major part.

The Akan religion has helped its adherents to cope with issues of life. What Andrew Kirk observes about popular religions is very true of the Akan religion:

Popular religious beliefs arise from the desire to make sense of the most fundamental questions posed by being alive - birth and death, stages of human sexual development (puberty, courtship, marriage), social status, sickness, and suffering, success and failure, work and the reason for existence. They also perhaps more obviously, afford a way of coping successfully with everyday events. (1992:23)

It could be said that Akan society is thoroughly religiocentric. Many look to religion for answers to their problems. Religious beliefs and practices have been used to cope with various life issues such as illness and supernatural powers. When confronted with all kinds of existential problems like, poverty, child birth or death, sickness, famine, shame, and poor harvest, they would resort to the traditional religion to provide answers or solutions to them.

What is missing in Christianity's encounter with traditional religion is that these beliefs and remedial measures were denied as superstitious and discouraged as pagan practices. Again, serious efforts were not made to ascertain the functions of the various elements in the Akan religion, and to subsequently provide acceptable substitutes. This has led to a situation which anthropologists describe as "cultural voids" which deprive the people of essential cultural activity and zest for life. Can we really blame the Akan who finds it expedient to occasionally fall back on the antidotes he or she knows and trust best to perform these necessary functions in times of crisis?

While we accept that Christianity is unique and can be seen as people's highest response to God, this is no ground for missionary arrogance and denial of a people's religious experience. Traditionally, Christians have had negative judgements on all other religions as idolatrous. Religion unavoidably uses cultural forms, concepts, symbols, and meaningful actions. The plain truth is

we cannot effectively engage in cross-cultural ministry if we fail to touch the religious experience of the people.

The problem is that we have often engaged in Christian missionary activities as if it is Christianity which saves rather than Christ. Thus a people's religious experience has often not been taken seriously. I do not want to be misunderstood here as proposing that Akan traditional religion has salvific efficacy. Again, we do not accept that there is a plurality of revelations. Our only concern is in the outright denial of a people's religious experience, because God has been at work in every culture even before Christianity was introduced. This is the whole point of divine initiative in the Christian doctrine of revelation. John Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace gives affirmation to this.

Akan Holistic Attitude to Life

Our discussion of the Akan traditional beliefs and practices leads us to conclude that traditional religion has persisted because it forms part and parcel of the daily lives of the people. Religion is not restricted to one area of life, rather it permeates all aspects of life so fully that it is often very difficult to isolate it. Life among the Akans is viewed holistically, whether the concern is physical, social, or religious. Life is not divided into logical and separate compartments but is seen holistically. Again, there is no division between the sacred and the secular. What Lamin Sanneh (1986:83) observes of African

communities that they "lived, moved and have their being in religion" is very true of the Akans.

The holistic attitude to life implies that there is no area of life which is outside the control of or influence from religion. Religion performs many functions including economic, social and political. The problem is the form of Christianity introduced by the missionaries did not take into serious consideration this holistic African approach to life. It tended to divide life into separate categories based on Western dualistic thinking, with its distinction between sacred and secular, individual and corporate, and material and spiritual. There were not serious efforts to relate Christianity to the daily lives of the people. We contend that traditional religion has persisted because the church in its ministry has not taken cognizance of this lack of separation between religion and daily life. As far as Akans are concerned this separation between religion and daily life does not work.

Failure to recognize this interrelation between religion and daily life, and relate the Christian message to it, has meant that some of the needs met by the old traditional religion are not met by the new religion.

This helps explain why many would revert to the old traditional religion. To the Akans any religious system that proves incapable of meeting their needs, or demonstrates lack of interest in other aspects of their daily lives, does not hold much appeal for them. It could be said therefore that Akans hold a pragmatic attitude towards religion. Religion is useful as long as it serves a

practical purpose. The traditional system which deals with all aspects of life therefore becomes appealing to many Akans especially in crisis situations.

Another side of the Akan religious experience is that salvation is sought for in terms of health, material, prosperity, fertility, and deliverance from demonic powers. These issues which are of ultimate concern to them do not appear to be seriously addressed by the church hence many turn to the traditional system which deals with such issues about daily life.

Conversion of Akan Worldview Has Not Occurred

The persistence of traditional religion can be explained by the fact that the process of innovation (i.e conversion in Christian terms) has not successfully taken place among many Akan Christians. Granted that conversion occurs at the level of personal encounter with God and involves a change in worldview, it could be argued that conversion has not truly occurred since many Akan Christians maintain their traditional worldview. They have adopted the Christian faith while their worldview has remained intact. We must note that worldview assumptions play a crucial role in conversion. A real, thoroughgoing change needs to occur at both the surface (behavior) and deep (worldview) levels of a culture. In other words the assumptions, values, and allegiances that lie deeply embedded beneath the surface of cultural behavior need to be changed to support whatever changes

are made in behavior, if the change is to be pervasive and lasting (cf. Kraft 1992:264).

The fact that many Akan Christians still hold on to their traditional worldview and maintain their membership of the church means that a real thorough change has not occurred. In any successful socio-cultural change the changes need to occur at both surface and deep levels. Indeed if conversion to Christianity is to be genuine, it must involve the basic assumptions, values, and allegiances of the people, a change of their worldview. According to Alan Tippett (1987:168-74), if changes are made at the surface without corresponding changes at the deep level it results in a condition of "submersion"—a situation in which new surface behavior is combined with essentially unchanged deep-level assumptions to produce a syncretistic brand of religion. This is the situation found among many people in the church who have not completely discarded the old elements in the traditional religion.

It must also be noted that the persistence of the traditional worldview means that the basic values, and thought pattern of a people often remains conservative. As Shank has noted:

It is unrealistic on the part of those who bring change from the outside to assume that a synchronization of values and thought pattern has been accomplished. A people's world view can remain intact far longer than customs, beliefs and aspects of its culture. Change in to another religion such as Christianity and Islam in Africa can leave a specific traditional world view unchanged. (1987:199)

Kraft makes the same observation when he says that "though a person who becomes a Christian will need to make significant changes in his or her worldview, that person never exchanges his or her whole worldview for another one" (1989:80).

The failure of innovation to occur may also be attributed to the manner in which Christianity was introduced. The work of Rogers (1983) is helpful here in underscoring this point. Rogers suggests among other things that when something is introduced into a society and fails to take root in the host culture, it is usually because the supposed receptors were not given enough knowledge and time to be persuaded about the innovation. Since the decisions for acceptance were coerced, they could not lead to the implementation, confirmation, and re-invention needed to establish them. At best, such innovation perishes with the cessation of the external pressure (1983:163-209).

Even though Rogers was not talking about the introduction of Christianity, nevertheless what he says is helpful in understanding why Christianity introduced by the missionaries as external agents has failed to take root in the Akan culture. The manner in which it was and is being presented to the Akan, such as using rules and regulations to get the Akans to abandon their traditional beliefs and practices without adequate understanding, was not an effective way to bring about an innovation. In a sense the church has been its own gravedigger through the methods by which its message has been presented and introduced. The desire to innovate must come from the people

themselves and not be coerced. People must be led to a point where they can ask themselves "what shall we do to be saved?" (cf. Acts 16:30) rather than the message being imposed upon them. Again, as far as Christian faith is concerned, change cannot occur through legalism but by the transforming power of God.

Missionary and Colonial Factors

Although colonialism has disappeared, and the church today is not under the direct control of missionaries, they have left a thorough imprint on the church. It has left a kind of religio-cultural split within the African soul as the African is caught between two worlds—Western Christianity and traditional African culture. The average Akan Christian can be described as 50% Christian and 50% traditional religionist. Desmond Tutu (1979:484) has accurately described this split as "religious schizophrenia". The church today is therefore confronted with a religio-cultural legacy left from missionaries and colonialism.

The negative attitude of many missionaries and the colonial regime towards the traditional religion has left the church with a religio-cultural legacy of split-level Christianity which the church today must deal with. The early missionaries operating under assumptions of Western thought de-emphasized and pushed Akan traditional beliefs into the background. Certain elements in Akan culture that were not readily understood by them were

rejected as of little significance or treated as superstition. There was also a naive endorsement of most aspects of the Western worldview and culture as inherently Christian. My research indicates that what S.G. Williamson succinctly affirmed several years ago is still true today:

Christian faith as historically implanted by the Western missionary enterprise among the Akan has proved unable to sympathize with or relate its message spiritually to Akan spiritual outlook. Its impact is thereby dulled. It has launched a frontal attack on Akan traditional outlook. But the method and means adopted to secure this end, relying as they did on Western enlightenment, as set forth through a westernized form of Christianity, had the effect of calling the Akan out of his traditional environment, not of redeeming him within it. The Christian missionary impact constituted a denial of the Akan world view, as indeed did westernism as an influence present in Government, commerce, and social contact, and expressed through western art, science, technology, and learning, and was not a sympathetic effort to meet the Akan's spiritual need. (1965:175)

The early missionaries can scarcely be blamed for they were never trained on how to encourage the development of an indigenous theology or church structure. Nevertheless, the impact of this onslaught on the traditional religion is still felt today. Even though the church has discouraged converts from participating in traditional beliefs and practices, there is a persisting tendency, a chronic inclination, to engage in certain forms of traditional practices. The attitude of the church has only resulted in submerging those beliefs and practices, but they re-surface particularly during times of crisis.

The church today appears to be faithfully preserving the legacy left to it by the missionaries. For example, having been tutored on what is

"Methodism," or the Methodist faith, some of the national pastors are even more rigid in enforcing Methodist rules and regulation than were their mentors. For example, the church continues to exclude polygamists from participating in the Lord's Supper.

With the demise of colonialism, and cultural renaissance occurring in the countries that were formerly under European colonial rule, the church is now forced to deal with these issues. It must also be noted that the Akan religious scene has now been transformed from a monopoly by the missionary established churches into a competitive market. There are several new religious movements competing for attention and allegiance of the people. If the church is to be relevant then it must relate its message to the culture of the people.

Akans Tendency to Add New Religion to the Old

Another factor that has contributed to the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices is the very nature of African religions. The Akan religion, like other Primal Religions, is basically not a missionary religion, and has a tendency to accommodate other religious ideas. Being religious by nature, the Akans would in most cases welcome any religion that affirms God. This explains why Christianity was accepted with little resistance when it was first introduced.

It could therefore be argued that Christianity for many Akans became something "extra" to be added to the spiritual resources which they already had. While many embraced the Christian faith, they were nevertheless not prepared to abandon their old religion completely for the new. It seems to me that the idea of conversion as a total break from one faith in favor of another appears to be foreign to many Akans; rather, new gods are simply added to old ones. An observation made by Christensen several years ago seems to remain true today:

Since Fante religion is polytheistic and pluralistic, becoming a Christian while still retaining traditional beliefs need not conflict for the African, for adoption of a new deity does not necessarily imply negation of the old; it is rather to be regarded as an additive factor for protection against the uncertainties of life. (1959:270)

The Fante saying that *nam dodoow nsee nkwan*, meaning "having too much meat in a soup does not spoil the taste of it" appears to reinforce this view of adding other religious ideas to what one already has. It can be said that the introduction of Christianity and Islam into Akan society added new gods to the existing ones. These religions were embraced as an addition to the spiritual resources which the Akans already had. People sought power from the new religion primarily for individual concerns and Christianity was used to supplement rather than replace traditional sources of religious power. This helps to explain why many adherents of these new faiths still cling on to the old religion. Many Akans go back and forth between Christianity, Islam, and

traditional religion in seeking answers to their spiritual problems and are not disturbed about the apparent contradiction in their teaching.

Our findings here tally with what Charles Kraft, a notable missiologist, has observed about the problem of adding other religious ideas to existing ones found in other societies in the world. He writes:

It is the fact that for many (probably most) of the peoples of the world, the felt need for more spiritual power seems to be more important to them than the mere perpetuating of their traditional religious practices. People from all walks of life will, therefore, often gladly incorporate into their lives techniques for gaining additional spiritual power derived from other religious traditions while feeling no compulsion to convert to that other tradition. (1992:269)

Perception of Some Akan Beliefs as Real

One of the reasons why certain elements in Akan religious beliefs has persisted is that they are perceived to be real. Although Akan beliefs, like witchcraft, are denied as primitive and superstitious, it is difficult to convince the average Akan that they are not real, especially when they are confronted with the evidence of its working before their eyes.

I was struck in my own work by the degree to which many of my informants remain unshaken in their religious beliefs particularly with regard to witchcraft and evil powers. Of the 60 members of the church I interviewed on the question "Do you believe in the reality of witchcraft/evil forces? 90 per cent affirmed that beliefs in witchcraft and evil spirits which are important characteristics of the Akan religion are very real. This is true even of those

who have received western education. In reply to the above question a professor at the University of Ghana stated categorically that "it is only the ignorant westerner who will say that these African beliefs are superstitious".

The incident we cited earlier about the students at the University of Ghana amply demonstrates this. Many Akans seem to be constantly using their beliefs to "explain" certain phenomena such as misfortunes, diseases, and sudden death. This in a sense is a serious worldview issue that faces the people. Several of my informants, including some pastors, made statements to the effect that belief in witchcraft and evil spirits are real. The Reverend Kwesi Dickson, President of the Methodist Church, Ghana cited an incident which indicates that belief in evil forces is widespread among many members of the church. According to him he woke up one morning to find a dead vulture on his car. Some leaders of the church came to him encouraging him to do something about or seek the cause of it as it was a sign of a bad omen.³

In one incident a member of the church, whom I consider to be one of the faithful members, reported that a girl of 14 she had adopted confessed to being a witch, and that she had been responsible for her recent misfortunes. The girl had performed witchcraft on her with the co-operation of some members of her family.

Our research indicate that belief in witchcraft and evil powers is found even among the pastors. Of the 30 pastors interviewed 25 per cent of them did not deny the reality of these powers. Only 5 per cent of them expressed

some skepticism about the beliefs in the existence and activities of evil spirits and witches. Many people still hold the view that diseases and misfortunes can be caused by supernatural powers.

One pastor in an interview narrated to me an incident where a member of the church openly confessed that she was a witch, and that she and members of the church have been responsible spiritually for an illness which has constantly plagued his wife. The above examples show how traditional beliefs are perceived to be real.

Table 2

Members Position on Traditional Beliefs

Category	Total Survey	Yes	No	Uncertain
Spirits	60	95%	3%	2%
Witchcraft	60	90%	8%	2%
Ancestors	60	80%	10%	10%

There has been on the part of the church a negation or denial of the validity of these beliefs. For example in the 1930s the Christian Council appointed a committee to study the phenomenon of witchcraft. The report of the committee published in 1932 took the position that witchcraft was not a reality but only a psychological delusion. The Christian Council again in the 1940s made vehement attacks against *tigari* cult, a fetish cult which was exerting influence on members of the church and ordered an investigation of

this cult. The report of the committee took the position that the *tigari* cult was a trick and a mere superstition. Accordingly the Christian Council in 1948 published a pamphlet, *Tigari or Christ*, aimed at offering practical suggestions whereby the Christian community can oppose and defeat the influence of this fetish.⁴

According to an informant during the deliberations of the committee, one of the practitioners of the *tigari* cult challenged members of the committee of pastors appointed to investigate the activities of the cult to allow witchcraft to be performed on the child of one member of the committee so they could see whether witchcraft is true or false. Surprisingly none of the committee members would respond to the challenge. In my opinion, to deny the possibility or actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery is to contradict the Word of God because there are several passages in the Bible which gives affirmation to their existence (Exodus 22:18, Galatians 5:20)

During my field work I was told several stories which indicate that supernatural forces are perceived to be real rather than mere superstition. An informant narrated to me an incident which occurred during the construction of Tema Harbor. The story goes that an attempt by the construction workers to fell a particular tree would result in the death of a worker. The site in particular was believed to be a fetish grove. For that reason they had to call in a traditional priest to perform certain rites before the tree could finally be felled. As the tree began to come down blood was seen flowing from it.

Another rite had to be performed again. The story continues that as the chain saw reached the middle of the tree a bird came out of the tree before it finally came down.

A family head or *ebusuapanyin* also told me a story which happened to some fishermen who went out to fish in the sea and got lost in the midst of a heavy storm. While they were wandering, they saw a small canoe and decided to paddle towards it. The story goes that as they moved towards it the small canoe also kept moving, and they could never reach it. They kept following it until they were led ashore to a coastal village called Asaafa and the small canoe went out of sight. It happened that one of the crew members came from this village. The belief was that it was an ancestor who rescued them from such danger and led them ashore.

These stories and many others makes it hard to dismiss such beliefs in the minds of many Akans as superstitious. The question is what do we make of these stories? The church has in some respect chosen to overlook such stories and regarded them as part of the superstitious beliefs of the people. My own opinion is that some of these empirical phenomena cry out for explanation other than scientific ones since science cannot explain everything. The Akan will use religion to explain these events which remain intransigently opaque. It is fair to say that the western naturalism has no epistemological categories in which to place such mysterious happenings.

What we infer from all this is that traditional beliefs are perceived by many to be real. This helps to explain why people have not given them up even though the church has discouraged such beliefs. Perhaps merely denying their reality is not the best way of delivering the people from them.

Fear Associated With Supernatural Powers

An understanding of the worldview of the Akans has given us more clues as to why many continue to indulge in traditional beliefs and practices. The sense of fear many Akans have, arising from constant threat of principalities and powers, lead many Akans to seek some sort of insurance against these powers. The Akans see themselves as surrounded by spiritual forces which impinge upon their daily lives. On the practical level because of the fear that these forces can inflict harms on humans such as illness, death, and misfortunes people protect themselves with amulets, charms, anti-witchcraft medicine, etc.

These protective measures obtained from traditional religious specialists are regarded as "good medicine" since they are not used to harm others. Some church members secretly consult religious specialists to arm themselves with some of these protective devices. Some hang fetishes on their doorway, while others put them under their bed or wear them in the form of rings, necklace etc.

The fear of supernatural forces is found even among some church leaders. The President of the Methodist Church related to me in an interview the case of a pastor who feared that someone would cast a spell on him.⁵ *woboto me edur*. This pastor was not prepared to be appointed to that particular station. Another informant cited the case of a pastor who went to a traditional healer for a protective charm.

One can infer from all this that the world of the Akan is constantly under threat by natural and social calamities which include disasters, epidemics, sorcery and other anti-social forces. The central focus of religious activities is therefore geared towards the warding of cosmic and social evils. It could also be said that these beliefs in supernatural forces also give people unnecessary fear and anxiety.

I will digress to point out that "Deliverance ministry" has become very popular among some Christian groups in Ghana today. I would think the popularity of this ministry is due to the fact that it is consonant with the traditional world view of the Akans. In this ministry demonic forces are attributed to be at work in people's lives bringing about other spiritual problems. To free people from demonic spirits that oppress them causing sickness etc. prayers are made to cast these demons out of people. I visited one of the prayer groups where deliverance ministry is carried out. My observation was that during the deliverance process people are sometimes made to spit, cough or vomit to let the demons out.⁶ This practice of

identifying demonic forces at work in persons, and seeking to exorcise them appears to be consonant with the traditional belief system. Small wonder that it has become very popular in Ghana.

Traditional practices relating with the ancestors have persisted because of the nagging fear that failure to perform those rituals will result in incurring the displeasure of the ancestors. The ancestors are believed to possess power to bless as well as punish individuals. People indulge in these traditional practices to play it safe.

In the same manner traditional practices such as widowhood rites are indulged in for fear that failure to observe them will result in the ghost of the deceased spouse causing some harm to the surviving wife. The usual expression used by the Fantes is *no kun ne sesa beka no do*, which means, the ghost of the deceased husband will haunt her. Thus even though the church has discouraged such practice among its members such fears have led many people to continue to indulge in them albeit clandestinely.

The problem with the church is that it has not taken the concerns and fears of the people much more seriously. In a sense the church has treated the spirit world as if it does not exist. We therefore think that it is exceedingly unproductive to deny the reality of evil spirits which threaten the lives of people. These powers must be confronted and dealt with using the spiritual resources available to us as Christians. If Christ dealt with these issues why

should the church deny and neglect them. The Akan Christian needs to be reminded that Christ has power over all these forces.

The Church is Perceived as Impotent

Many Akans perceive the church as impotent in dealing with some problems that confront them. From the responses to the question "why should a Christian go to a traditional healer?" it was clear that many consider the church impotent to deal with some spiritual problems such as a curse. Such problems to them are best handled by the traditional healers. According to one informant she was forced to consult a traditional priest because the church was not helpful in dealing with a spiritual problem with which she was confronted. The belief among many Akans is that the spiritual contact which the traditional religious specialist have with the spirit world gives them insights into the nature and causes of people's spiritual problems, hence they are consulted on such issues.

I am also inclined to think that many members of the church have limited God's ability to deal with certain problems which traditionally are considered to belong to the sphere of the traditional priests. They do not see God as big enough to handle every problem. Thus in crises moments they will resort to the traditional system as a means of coping with such crises. Imasogie (1983) makes a similar observation:

...many African Christians perceived the "God" of Christianity as a "stranger God," the god of the white man, who is unfamiliar

with the local spiritual problems. To these Africans, Christianity was of no practical use in times of existential crisis. It seemed much more reasonable to them to revert to traditional practices when faced with serious situations unfamiliar to the God of the white man. (1983:69)

Unlike the traditional religious specialists who are considered to have supernatural powers and often feared because of their contact with the spirit world, the ministers of the church are not perceived as such.

Many church members will therefore take their problems to these religious specialists without even discussing them with their ministers.⁷ It appears that many of the church leaders either lack the spiritual power to deal with people's spiritual problems or they have not learnt to exercise spiritual authority?⁸

In the traditional religion when a god or fetish fails to meet the needs of its adherents, it is abandoned for a more effective one. Many church members would therefore resort to the traditional system in search of security without being bothered by the apparent contradiction between the two faiths, particularly when life is threatened or a situation is considered to be a matter of life and death. The usual feeling among people in this situation is that, the end justifies the means. Again there is feeling among some church members that it is sinful only when the traditional system is used to harm others; otherwise they see nothing wrong with it. Over sixty percent of those I interviewed say it is okay to resort to the traditional system for help as long as you don't hurt others. In a sense one can sympathize with those who feel this

way particularly in a situation where church has not provided adequate response to their existential problems. The solution is for the church to respond to these issues. This is the whole point in my undertaking this research.

Many people including church members resort to the traditional religious specialist to seek help in one form or another. Margaret Field identifies six common "psychological" problems as the cause for which Christians and non-Christians alike go to traditional shrines, viz: depression, fear, anxiety unrelated to guilt, paranoia, schizophrenia, mental illness resulting from physical illness" (1960:275-375). It must be pointed out that what Field sees as psychological, the Akan may not interpret the same way. For the Akan it may be the result of the remote control of an external spiritual force.

Some of my informants confided in me that they have consulted traditional religious specialists in cases to seek divinations, revoke spells and curses, de-witching, infertility, and healing. Some testified about having their problems resolved in this way. A member of the church whom I consider to be a very dedicated Christian told me about a problem which forced her to consult with a traditional healer:

I was experiencing some chronic stomach disorders. I took it to the hospital where I went through a major surgery but the problem persisted. My parents who were members of the church worried about my condition which was becoming worse and worse, so I consulted a traditional healer who identified the cause of the problem as spiritual. My parents encouraged me to seek

treatment from this traditional healer. According to the traditional healer the cause of the pains was that a pot had been spiritually placed in my stomach. This needed to be broken and destroyed before I ever become free. I was healed after he made me go through some rituals.⁹

According to this fine Christian she had shared this problem with her church leader but the church proved to be ineffective in helping her deal with the problem. This is one example which illustrates that the church is often perceived to be powerless in dealing with some problems considered to be spiritual that face some of the church members. The above example shows that some church members resort to the traditional healing practices out of desperation or when their situation is considered a matter of life and death. One can argue that the training church leaders receive does not adequately prepare them to deal with these practical spiritual issues. Seminary training has been more academically oriented, and influenced by a Western worldview where such issues are not a major problem.

Church leaders have often been worried about their members frequently reverting to the traditional beliefs and practices. They constantly condemn and rebuke such members in their preaching for their disloyalty and insincerity or their lack of faith in God. Church leaders in their preaching have often called upon Ghanaians to choose between the traditional religion and the Christian faith, and recommended the Christian faith as a viable option. But in spite of such condemnations from the pulpits, people still resort to the traditional ways. Some will indulge in these practices secretly to avoid being noticed by

church leaders. It is evident that their faith in the old traditional system could only be shaken by the demonstrably superior power of the new religion (Christianity).

Church members who have sought help from the traditional system in crises times often come back to church to give their thank offerings to God. A typical announcement read on Sundays in many Methodist Churches contains many of such thanks to God for deliverance from various crises in their lives. People come to give thanks to the Lord even when they have resorted to sources outside the church for help in dealing with those crises. The good news about it is that God is given the glory even after they have paid their vows to the lesser deities.

The Akan View of Cause and Effect

The typical African sees life as a mystery to be lived out on a mysterious earth ruled by spiritual forces of good and evil. There is no event without spiritual or metaphysical significance, and nothing happens by chance. Where the Western scholar introduces the concept of chance, hazard, statistical probability, the average Akan would look for some spiritual explanation. For example, some illnesses and deaths are the result of deliberate remote control power on the part of some evil spiritual forces.

My research shows that many Akans continue to adhere to the traditional explanations for the causes sickness and misfortunes. Out of the 60

people interviewed, 50 believed that there can be spiritual causes to diseases and misfortunes.

Such views about causality lead people feeling unsatisfied with naturalistic explanations of certain events of life. Traditional religious specialists are therefore frequently consulted because they are able to provide such explanations about unexplainable events of life. This point is also made by Parrinder when he affirms that:

If anything is lost, if a barren woman desires children, if there is a mysterious disease, if a man is troubled by strange dreams, and for many other causes, the diviner is sought out and he has cause to geomancy. The diviner may be called in at all the important crises of life. (1976:120)

It could be said that many Akan Christians revert to the traditional medical system because the church and Western medical practitioners have refused to take the Akan view of causality seriously. It is important that the healing ministry of the church take cognizance of the healing needs recognized by the people. For example when people are urged to break with medicines and charms of the past, it must be compensated with the power of God to heal and deliver people from all evil powers.

Similarity of Akan and Biblical Worldviews

One reason why many Akan Christians have not completely given up their traditional beliefs and practices because of apparent similarity between their worldview and the Christian moral code as expressed in the Bible.

Dickson (1984:159) affirms that "a kindred atmosphere" connects African traditional religion and the Old Testament. Key elements of affinity include religion's pervasiveness in all activities of life, the preponderance of rituals and rites; the importance of oral tradition, and the centrality of solidarity and group loyalty.

The Akans are therefore more at home when they read the Old Testament. They read the Bible and find such things as the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament, pouring of libation, sacrifices of animals to God, and the driving away of demons by Jesus, and tend to identify them with their indigenous beliefs. They do not see their traditional beliefs as conflicting with basic Christian beliefs.¹⁰

The problem is that because the Western worldview and culture have no place for some of the Akan beliefs and practices, the church has dismissed such Akan views of cause and effect as superstitious. For example, the activities of demonic spirits is something that many in the Western church have not taken seriously. As Musk affirms:

The biblical picture of causality in sickness is in fact far removed from the typical Western view. For the Westerner, germs, bacteria, and other strictly empirical phenomena are responsible. Even where psychosomatic process are admitted, treatment still proceeds on the assumption that the reasons for the illness lie with the patient himself. It is his reaction to stress; it is a virus in his body. The Western emphasis subordinates the question "why" to that of "how" whereas the Bible all along majors on the "why" rather than on the physical or psychological detail of "how." (1989:107)

Kinship Obligations

Traditional belief and practices persists because of the nature of Akan social organization. In Akan society there is a strong sense of community cohesion as compared to the kind of individualism we find in most Western societies. The Akan traditional society is a kin-bound society. Kinship solidarity is of paramount importance. The Akan philosophy can be properly described as "I am only because we are, and since we are therefore I am."

Again, traditional religion is at the heart of the Akan culture and serves as a way to hold their life together especially in community ritual performance such as funeral observance. Some of the traditional practices take place within the context of the external family. Thus there is some cultural expectations or obligations on Christians who are also members of the extended family. As members of an *ebusua* or the external family they are expected to participate in these events.

We may divert here and remark that this strong sense of community solidarity among Africans is something the Church in the West can learn from Africa because it reaffirms the Christian faith that God created us for relationship, not only with himself but with each other.

A continuing challenge facing Akan Christians is how to maintain the Christian faith in the face of the strong influence of the traditional culture. Most Christians, even the dedicated ones, often find themselves in a dilemma because they are expected to behave in culturally appropriate ways

particularly when they visit their ancestral homes or when there is death in the family. The problem lies in the fact traditional beliefs and practices, such as pouring of libation to the gods and ancestors, feature prominently in most family activities and in all rites of passage.

As we have noted earlier there is no Fante or Akan person who does not belong to an *ebusua* (family). In the ancestor cult we find the unity and continuity of the family. The clan or extended family system acts as a pressure to engage in traditional practices. It has not been easy for most Christians to disassociate themselves completely from certain traditional practices, such as pouring of libation to the ancestors, when one visits the ancestral home because they are culturally bound to do so. One must therefore take a stand either to participate or not participate in them. My own experience is that even when one is unwilling to do that because of one's allegiance to Christ the family head will often ask for money from you to buy drink and do it on your behalf. The role of the traditional religion as an important part of the social relationship makes it difficult to break from it (Sempore 1991:96).

The Akan strives to maintain harmony with the ancestors. This harmony is maintained or restored through observing the right rituals, avoiding taboos etc. It is the practice to remember the ancestor anytime family members meet, through the pouring of libation to the ancestors. This practice is likely to continue so long as the clan system continues. Perhaps it will require a matter of time to be able to change it.

It must also be said that relating Christian understanding and experience to Akan life and thought is something the church, particularly the historic ones, have tended to avoid. The Gospel has been presented to the people as though it were concerned with an entirely different compartment of life, unrelated to traditional religious piety. There has been the tendency on the part of the church to reject the traditional religion in order to affirm the distinctiveness of Christianity. This situation has resulted in many Christians living "at two levels", half Africans and half Christians, but never belonging properly to either. Literally, many Akan Christians have one foot in the church and another foot in the extended family with all the traditional religious beliefs and practices associated with it.

It appears that the impact of Christianity on the group life and culture has generally been ignored by the Church. Emphasis has usually been placed on individual conversion. The insistence of the church for members not to participate in traditional practices often implies that converts would have to neglect their external family obligation, and the authority of the chief and elders. But as far as the Akan is concerned this is difficult to achieve.

It Is Our Custom

One of the reasons why traditional beliefs and practices have persisted among the Akans is that some people just feel they are culturally bound to do so. In other words that is the way they must behave as Akans. In my field

work I observed that some of these traditional practices appear to have become part and parcel of the everyday lives of the people and they do not stop to question why they do them.

Many of the people I interviewed could not explain the meaning attached to certain traditional practices. "It is our custom" or to use the proper Fante phrase "*kusum amandze wonsee no*" is both the ground and defence for most people who engage in some of the traditional practices. I had to turn to some knowledgeable members of the community, i.e the elders, and traditional rulers for an informed knowledge about the traditional beliefs and practices.

Failure to Contextualize Christianity

The crucial question for the church today is whether or not the Christian faith has been adequately presented to the Akans? One is right to say that failure of the church to relate its message to Akan life and thought has contributed in no small way to split-level Christianity among the Akans. As Busia observed long ago:

One should not too readily accuse the converts of frailty or hypocrisy. It is rather the Christian church which must ask whether converts from an alien culture, say African or Asian, have received instruction as to what the Christian faith has to say about life as a whole--about nature, man, society and God; about the universe and the meaning of life. (1961b:87)

Busia further observes that:

The converts come with such knowledge, beliefs or assumptions about man, nature, society and God as their culture offers them. These go to the root of life, as well as seeking to give meaning to

the whole of life, in this world and hereafter. They therefore influence choices and conduct and actions, particularly during critical moments of life. (1961b:87-88)

The Christian message has been communicated in forms that do not take the religio-cultural background of the people into consideration, so that the people could understand and relate to their daily lives in much the same way as the traditional religion forms part and parcel of their daily lives. This in a way has contributed to the problem of split-level Christianity. In communicating the message, missionaries and nationals alike have approached the people as if they were Europeans or Americans.

Again those who have communicated the gospel have often come with their own agenda and ready-made questions and answers without taking into consideration the relevance of the message or method of communication to the hearers. These may not be the questions the hearers are asking. This way of communicating the gospel, which Kraft (1979:152) describes as the "catechumen approach" may result in irrelevance, or scratching people where they do not itch. It is the hearer not the communicator, who often determines what is being communicated or what the gospel means for his or her own context. This helps us understand why the imposition of Christian values on Akans has failed. This has been noted by Turnbull when he writes:

Any attempt by a European to explain European concepts (e.g snow) is likely to misinterpretation. This may be one reason why Christianity has such a difficult time. Heaven, which seems to be one of the central themes used to bribe Africans into acceptance of the Christian code, is generally translated into African languages giving it some connotation of the sky, a place in the

clouds. If this coincided with an African belief in the existence of such a place that would be fine, but usually it does not. (1962:213)

Again, the theology of the church has been presented in foreign categories which are not very meaningful to the average Akan. The participants of the Accra Conference in 1979 put their finger on the problem when they observed that "the life of our churches has been dominated by a theology developed with a methodology, a worldview, and a conception of humanity using western categories" (1979:172). The fact is that theological concepts have been conveyed to the Akans through inappropriate linguistic vehicles. This makes the need to root the gospel in the African situation, where the Christ event is interpreted and explicated in the African context, an urgent task for the church.

The church has continued to rely on foreign Bible commentaries to convey the meaning of the gospel to Africans. One also observes that preachers often use language adorned with flowery phraseology and spiced with Greek and Hebrew terminology not readily understood by the people. It seems to me that such preachers are often more eager to show their intellectual ability than to make sure that the theology or concepts they are propounding are understood by the people.

The same is also true with the hymnody and liturgy of the church, where Western hymns and liturgies developed in the West continue to be used by the Akan church. These foreign hymns and liturgies, some of which are

unsuitable, have been translated wholesale into the Fante language for the indiscriminate consumption of the Fante worshippers. It true that some Fante lyrics and local choruses (spiritual songs) are used in the church service, but the foreign liturgy and hymns continue to dominate. The effect of all this is that people do not feel at home in the Church.

Summary and Conclusions

From the evidence adduced so far it is clear that in spite of the impact of Christianity and Islam, Akan traditional religion is alive and well. The evidence is compelling and overwhelming that many Akans have welcomed the Christian gospel, but it does not necessary imply that they have said good bye to beliefs and practices which for centuries have been part of their philosophies. Christianity has only touched certain aspects of their lives. Today there is strong evidence of a return to traditional religion particularly in times of crises.

We would not be surprised if some would concede that the Akan worldview we have presented here might have been true in the nineteenth century, but they may argue that the advent of Christianity and the impact of Western culture has changed all of this. We do not dispute that religious change has occurred among the Akans. Culture is dynamic and no culture has remained static; the Akan culture is therefore no exception. All we are saying is that in spite of these cultural changes, certain traditional beliefs and

practices have not gone with the wind of socio-cultural change that has blown all over Africa since its contact with the West. We can only say that some of the traditional practices are not practiced with the same intensity as they used to be before contact with the West and the introduction of Christianity.

Our goal in this chapter has been two-fold:

(1) to bring valuable information about why Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices have persisted, and (2) to uncover the spiritual and physical needs of Akans and thereby enhance the dialogue between Christianity and traditional religion, as well as church leaders and their members. Our purpose is also to bring this valuable information to the attention of church leaders so they can plan a ministry strategy that will bring vitality and vigor to the church, making it relevant and challenging for Akan society today.

From all indications the church has not aggressively sought to express the Christian faith in the Akan cultural context to enable Christianity to take root and grow in the Akan context. Many Akans are limping between Christian faith and indigenous religion. Christianity is often looked upon as a foreign religion, not speaking to their needs. What, for example, is the value of singing "In the bleak mid winter ... snow had fallen" (Methodist Hymn No. 137) when many Akans have not experienced snowfall? This leads us to our next discussion where we will make some specific recommendations as to how Christianity can be made to be both challenging and relevant.

End Notes

1. I observed during my field study that some *ebusuapanyin* or heads of family were Muslims and during family gatherings, they do not disassociate themselves from certain traditional observances. The only thing they would conspicuously avoid is alcoholic drinks that are usually served during those gathering. I am told that some of them drink in secret and not in public.
2. It is a common practice among doctors in Ghana to ask family members to take a patient home when they cannot find a cure for the disease.
3. Interview with Rev. Kwesi Dickson on April 18, 1992.
4. The Social Welfare Report to the Gold Coast District Synod and Missionaries meeting 1949 says that "the pamphlet has had a wide and rapid sale and is being translated into vernacular."
5. Interview with Rev. Kwesi A. Dickson April 18, 1992. The President also cited an incident that occurred to him to illustrate the belief in these evil forces among church members. According to him he woke up one morning to find that there was a dead vulture on his car. Some of the leaders of the church encouraged him to look for the cause of that because it could be a bad omen. I was also told of some instances where pastors themselves have indulged in some magical practices.
6. I was told by this "deliverer" among other things that there are demonic forces trying to prevent my progress in life. There is therefore the need to deliver me from those forces.
7. I have personally observed this in my ministry where some of the members in my church have taken their spiritual problems elsewhere without any effort made to discuss them with me.
8. Mark 16:16ff affirms some of the spiritual authorities of the believer.
9. This member of the church was interviewed on May 3, 1992.
10. The leaders of many of the African Independent Churches have used the Old testament to justify some of the practices like sacrifices, and polygamy. A typical example is the M.D.C.C. Church where even the pastors are permitted to take more than one wife. The church also uses a lot of rituals.

SECTION III

PROPOSALS TO REVITALIZE THE CHURCH

CHAPTER 6

A Missiological Appraisal of the Church in Ghana Today

We have examined the church under the influence and control of the missionaries and the problem of split-level Christianity which has been a legacy bequeathed to the church. The missionaries have laid the foundation, and it is this foundation upon which we must build regardless of whether we feel positively or negatively about it.

The critical question then is "What is the present church under indigenous leadership doing to build and improve upon that foundation?" It is not uncommon to identify the mistakes of the early missionaries and to blame them for all the problems of Christianity in Africa while the same mistakes are perpetuated by the church under indigenous leadership but are often overlooked. In this chapter we will attempt a missiological appraisal of the church today, to find out whether it has been a part of the problem or the solution to the problem currently confronting the church, namely the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices. This leads us to reassess the liturgy, spirituality, church structure and polity of the Methodist Church in Ghana.

In this missiological appraisal of the church today under national leaders, our aim is not necessarily to criticize but to make an honest assessment that will help in dealing with the problem that confronts the

church. I have relied on my own experience as an Akan and one who has served as a pastor for over 14 years in the same church. I have also relied on the field work and interactions with many members and pastors of the church to find out their views on split-level Christianity and how the church might deal with it. What is said here is therefore based on observations from both an insider and outsider perspective.

The Methodist Church, Ghana

The Methodist church became an independent autonomous body from the British Methodist Conference in July 1961. Today it is under the leadership of nationals. Although there are a few missionaries present, these are regarded as fraternal workers rather than missionary administrators.

The predicament of the church in Ghana, as in many churches in Africa, is that it has been in captivity to Western Christianity, in the case of the Ghana Methodist Church the captivity has been to British Methodism. Theologies, liturgies, and church structures that were transplanted in Ghana have undergone very little changes.

Again, although the Methodist Church in Ghana has become an autonomous body, it has not achieved financial autonomy. There continues to be reliance on funds from abroad for many of their projects, including, further training of their ministers.¹ At independence local leaders inherited an anachronistic structure in which leaders were forced to follow the same

policies as the missionaries had done in the past by soliciting for funds from abroad.

This dependency on the West has also been caused by what one sees as an uneven distribution of the world's resources, in which most of the economies of the developing countries are poor and so have become increasingly dependent on industrialized countries. Thus churches have become dependent on Western churches in much the same way as their governments have relied on industrialized countries for aid and grants. It could be said that the churches in Africa have therefore become institutionalized beggars in which the leaders are continually asking for money and material goods from the West.

We recognize the need for partnership in mission and the value of our materially fortunate Christians in the West to contribute to their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Africa and other developing nations. At the same time, however, the church in Ghana cannot continue to rely on foreign support if it is to achieve a positive self-image, to gain self-respect, and to become culturally authentic.

Church Growth

We rejoice in the fact that the church has experienced some numerical growth. The statistics of the church show that between 1981 and the end of 1991, it has increased by 50,658 bringing the total numerical strength to

328,759. There are 425 ministers, 43 full time deaconesses and catechists, and 26,268 voluntary lay preachers and class leaders.²

The problem here is the quality of church membership. Judging from the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices among many of the members, it could be said that the experience of new birth has not been a reality in the lives of many of the members. Church growth is much more than a "numbers game." People need to be more established in the faith and grow up in spiritual awareness and maturity. Out of such growth will emerge a deeper relationship and commitment to God and his service.

The responses from many of the respondents to the question "how or why did you become a member of the church?" shows that many do not have a clear understanding of the Christian faith. Some of them have the misguided notion that their tickets to heaven have been secured by being baptized and confirmed. Perhaps they can be compared to the Jews who according to Jesus used to boast of having Abraham as their father, as if the faith of Abraham alone was what was required for their salvation.

Again looking at how the church has gained new members, it could be said that the growth of the church has been internal in character. All too often there is no real evangelism taking place. There is very little of going out to fish for people and so many churches do not regularly receive new converts into the faith. The churches have relied on traditional methods of gaining members, through biological and transfer growth.³ In the past the mission

schools were an important means of evangelism, but they have become less effective since they are now under government control. This means the church needs to rethink their strategy for mission and evangelism and intensify its efforts to take Christ to the market places.

Although the church has been experiencing some numerical growth the rate of growth has not been in proportion to the population of the country. While the population of the country has more than doubled since 1960 (6.5 million to 15.5 million) the church is only adding to its members.⁴ There is the need for an evangelism explosion to match with the increasing population growth or explosion. The traditional method of gaining members through the camp meeting, and revival meetings is no longer done with the same intensity as before.

It could be said that many pastors have regarded their role as being entirely pastoral in character, ministering primarily to those who more or less were born, lived and died in the fold of the church. They have become chaplains to their congregations, maintaining the existing church structures, rather than giving serious attention to their responsibility for other sheep outside the church.⁵ The Methodist Church seems to have betrayed its evangelical heritage by limiting its parish to the four walls of the church. Contrary to John Wesley's vision for the church, "The world is my parish," the parish has become their world. Churches with such limited vision cease to be a contagious church.

Meeting the Felt Needs of Members

The church has not been effective in meeting the felt needs of members, thus contributing to the problem of split-level Christianity. It is important to understand what the Akan expect from religion. The average Akan's expectation from religion can be identified as the following:

(1) social fellowship, (2) emotional experiences, (3) healing, and (4) insurance and security against evil forces. Before the advent of Christianity the traditional religion provided for these needs. Today many Akans become Christians with the high hope that Christianity will fulfill these needs more effectively than did their traditional religion, but it appears their hopes are not being fulfilled. As far as many Akans are concerned missionary Christianity has proved inadequate in meeting their expected religious needs. This in a way has contributed to the problem of split-level Christianity. As Berger rightly points out:

Religious groups must organize themselves in such a way as to woo consumers, in competition with other groups having the same purpose. All at once the question of "results" become important. (1967:138)

The church today continues to push into the background the supernatural elements in the Akan religion. But these beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery and evil forces, largely ignored by the church, are the people's existential experience. As Oosthuizen (1992:120) rightly affirms "they are forces to be reckoned with as they reflect the *sitz im leben* (the life situation) of the people." Several informants indicated to me their disappointment with the

church as far as meeting their spiritual needs are concerned.

There is overwhelming evidence that many church members look elsewhere to meet their needs because the church has not been able to satisfy these needs. We have indicated in the last chapter some evidence for this. An informant who has visited several of the traditional healers and African Independent Churches because of a problem of child birth stated categorically that she has been meeting a lot of church members at these places. This information was confirmed by several other informants who indicated they are forced to revert to sources outside the church to meet their needs because the church has not been meeting them.

Some members of the church, instead of reverting to the traditional system, would rather visit some of the many prayer groups and Independent Churches that abound in the country. Max Assimeng (1981:46) aptly describes the contemporary religious scene in Ghana as "Ghana's Religious Zoo" in which we witness not only complexity of religious expression but diversity and indeed divergence of theological expression. The proliferation of these churches and religious groups in Ghana makes it even more difficult to make an accurate census of these groups since they do not register with any body. The government of Ghana in 1989 made a move to have all religious bodies register with the government in an effort to control the proliferation of religious groups in the country. Professor Max Assimeng, the chairman of this committee, indicated to me that the aim of the government action was to

clamp down the activities of these religious groups who are exploiting the masses.⁶ The Christian Council of Ghana vehemently opposed the idea and refused to allow member churches to register for fear that it will infringe upon the religious liberties of individuals.

Some of the historic churches concerned about the exodus of their members to these churches have taken some measures to address the problem. For example, many have permitted the use of drums and dancing, which are characteristic of the Independent Churches, in their Methodist Church in an effort to stop the exodus.⁷ The Presbyterian Church for example has permitted the formation of a Bible Study and Prayer Group within the church. This group is charismatic in nature and has adopted some of the features of the Independent Churches such as speaking in tongues and healing.

The Catholics have also permitted a charismatic movement within their church. They have also a sanctuary at a place called Obooho in Ashanti Region where thousands of Catholics and non-Catholics go to seek spiritual, emotional, and physical healing through prayer and meditation.

Perhaps the Methodist Church could also start a similar group to be called Methodist Revival Fellowship. The church may also build a retreat center where church members and pastors can go and seek spiritual renewal. I believe this will go a long way towards dealing effectively with the problem of split-level Christianity and also stop the exodus of their members to other places. My observation and interaction with church members leads me to

conclude that there is there is a spiritual hunger and need which are not being fulfilled in the church. The members are looking for more spiritual experience than the church is not presently offering them. The church must surely be the place where people's spiritual thirst is quenched and hunger fed, the hospital where people can receive healing for their souls and bodies because God is the "Great Physician." Where this does not happen, people will naturally seek for it outside the church.

My impression is that the problem of split-level Christianity has persisted because the church has not effectively presented Jesus as all sufficient in meeting their needs. As Berger affirms:

religion can be more easily marketed if it can be shown to be relevant to private life than if it is advertised as entailing specific applications to the large public institutions. (1967:147)

The church has often seen its mission more in terms of preparing people for the life beyond than being concerned about some of the needs of the average member. The following Wesleyan hymn sung so very often that it has almost become a "national anthem", describes very well how the Methodist Church in Ghana has seen its mission:

A charge to keep I have
A God to glorify
A never dying soul to save
And fit it for the sky (Methodist Hymn Book No. 879)

All this implies that the agendas of the church and its average member do not coincide. The church tends to emphasize the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom, preparing people to be fit for heaven, and does little about

making people fit to live on earth. In Jesus' own preaching we also get the impression of the Kingdom being already present and not just belonging to the future. "The Kingdom of God has come, therefore repent and believe in the gospel" was the main thrust of Jesus' message (Mark 1:15). Thus there was a sense of realized eschatology in Jesus' message.

Lack of Indigenous Worship Service

The worship life of the church needs some comments. So far the church has not been able to develop a liturgy using some of the best features in the Akan culture to make worship more meaningful and make the Akans feel more at home in the church. The existing pattern of worship continues to be modeled after the worship tradition of the British Methodist Church. Worship can only be meaningful if it takes into account the innermost religious cravings of the people.

The church has been autonomous for over thirty years, but it has not stopped to examine some of its practices to see how relevant they are to the Akans. One observes that the church continues to use liturgy which is similar to the one used by the British Methodist Church. Certain aspects of the liturgy like the "Order for the Solemnization of Matrimony" are not very relevant to the Akans because, as Dickson (1976:179) observes, this Order for the Solemnization of Matrimony among other things "pronounces a couple one who in the matrilineal set-up belong to separate families and whose children

do not inherit the father's property."

It could also be said that many of those who lead Sunday worship service merely read from the *Some Nyebea* (Sunday order of service). In some cases some leaders have a hard time reading this Fante translation of the order of service of the British Methodist Church. A critical observation shows that some of the leaders are often so detached from the prayers they are offering that they are not part and parcel of them. In some respects the Sunday morning order of worship service has become more or less a mechanical repetition of the prayers in the liturgy. The same prayers are heard every Sunday. This mechanical repetition of other people's model deprives worship of its true wealth and worth as well as its effectiveness and relevance. The dead formalism in the worship service needs to be decried.

My observation is that where the worship leaders become less attached to the liturgy and allows extempore prayers the worshippers respond spontaneously. This points to the fact that while liturgical prayer is very important, it can also contribute to worship losing its zeal. In about six of the churches in the cities visited, where some of the members can read and write in English, half the service is in English and half is in the vernacular. The tendency is for the church leaders to exhibit their fluency with the English language rather than making the worship service meaningful.

Another characteristic of most of the congregation is the length of service. Sunday worship services last very long. It can last for an average

length of three hours. In some cases the service becomes boring and it is not uncommon to find some people dozing during church service.⁸ Many have expressed their feelings about the worship services. Some of the youth who do not find joy and satisfaction with the church worship are often attracted to the charismatic churches because of the lively song.⁹

On hymnody the church continues to use the Methodist Hymn Book translated into Fante. Some of the translations do not reflect the original meaning of the songs. The irony is that the British Methodist Church has revised this hymnal which the Ghana church does not want to discard. Many of the hymns pose problems of comprehension because they are couched in a language and in idioms which are not readily understood today. One cannot be absolutely sure the choir and the pastors themselves understand fully the hymns and anthems they sing.

One may wonder about the need for all this discussion and especially how it is related to our problem. We are of the view that worship services and hymns may not necessarily be part of the gospel or its specific verbal content; they do however condition the way people hear and interpret the Christian message particularly in the Akan situation where Christianity was introduced from outside. The hymns and worship service may evoke a positive or negative attitude towards Christianity depending on their relevance.

Non-Worship Elements

We observe that many non-worship elements have intruded into the worship life of the church which contributes to the church being perceived as irrelevant. They also contribute to the problem of split-level Christianity. Because the services are not designed to meet the need of the Akan worshippers, many people find less spiritual satisfaction in the church and so have to revert to other sources to meet their spiritual needs. The following are some of the things we observed in the church which in our opinion are non-worship elements which compounds the problem of split-level Christianity the church is faced with.

One observes that many non-worship elements have intruded into church worship services. In my own pastoral experience and through my research, I have noted the following three problems which need to be addressed. I will briefly discuss the first two and discuss the last one in detail.

Giving of Long-winded Announcements

Most of the churches do not use worship bulletins therefore all notices have to be given orally by the Society steward followed by some comments by the minister. In many cases these announcements alone can take over forty minutes. Some of the announcements include people giving thanks and offering to God for what he has done in their lives. As is often the case these announcements are longer than the sermon and prayer times.¹⁰ The problem

here is that the needs of the worshippers are often neglected as much time is spent on extraneous matters.

Long Worship Service

Church services usually last for an average of three hours. Such long services often entail a long period of sitting still on hard, crowded benches. In most cases the services become boring making some people doze. To keep the attention of the worshippers, ushers are detailed to walk up and down the aisle ordering silence, striking sleepers, etc.

Appeals for Funds in the Church.

By far the practice in the church which has attracted the most criticism from the general public and members of the church is the heavy emphasis the church has placed on money. Many of the churches are undertaking various programs such as building new chapels, mission houses, etc. To meet the budgets the church has used various means to obtain funds. These include:

1. the traditional Sunday offerings,
2. class dues,
3. annual harvest assessment,
4. specific contribution towards new chapel, organ, choir robes etc.

The above contribution required of members often places some financial burden on members many of whom have a hard time making ends meet.

Church members will make every efforts to meet their financial obligation to maintain their good standing with the church so that they are never denied a burial service.¹¹

In addition to the above means of obtaining funds, constant appeals for funds are made in the church during Sunday worship services and particularly on special occasions like funerals, and Easter and Christmas when the church is full of worshipers. Such occasions become a "harvest" time for money instead of souls. Many have complained that the church has become more preoccupied with money than concerned about the spiritual needs of its members.

One would not doubt that an essential aspect of our worship is the giving of oneself to God and being a good steward of God's resources. Christians are to regularly worship God with their money. Giving is a tangible expression of our faith and love towards God. The patriarchs, Jesus, and Paul all taught and practiced systematic giving (Genesis 14:20, Malachi 3:10, Luke 6:38, 1 Corinthians 9:7). The giving of our money is an essential part of our worship to God. We serve God and the church through our prayers, presence, service and gifts (money). It is these offerings which translate into the ministries and outreach of the church.

The problem is when this becomes the major emphasis in the church, especially during worship services, instead of spending time on spiritual needs as it is the case with most Methodist congregations. At worship services

people are often called upon more than twice to make an offering or respond to a special appeal for funds. Many of the congregations attempt to raise funds by appealing to their constituency on the basis of need and not a vision people can identify with. There is no doubt that a vision is the key to members' giving of money. People are moved to give to organizations that project a clear and well articulated vision and not just to bail out an organization whose balance shows a deficit. One will not be wrong to say that in the absence of any clear vision and stewardship education by many of the congregation, members are not motivated to give and so the church has to find a way of making them give.

The greater emphasis placed on money does not create a worshipful atmosphere which helps bring people into a meaningful encounter with the living God. It also drives away people from the fellowship of the church. Many have complained that the church has become more money conscious than being concerned about the spiritual needs of members.

An interesting incident that happened recently in one of the historic churches during a funeral service illustrates how people are not happy with the way things are done in the church. At the funeral service of a prominent man in the community, some of the worshipers felt that the service was going too long so they went to take the coffin from the church. They could not be persuaded to take the coffin back to the church for the priest to finish the service. The funeral service came to an abrupt end. I do not want to sound

like a prophet of doom here, but there is no doubt that this incident sends a warning signal to the church that if it does not change its methods the chances of similar incidents occurring in other churches are very high.

Another popular method of fund-raising is the Annual Harvest and Thanksgiving Services. In order to ensure that large sums are realized, targets are set and offering envelopes distributed to church and non-church members. The rich in the society are invited to be chairpersons and supporters. The effectiveness of the ministers is judged by the funds they are able to raise for the church. In the process the ministers spend much time and energy raising funds for the various church projects rather than building the spiritual lives of their congregation. Again, this in a way contributes to the problem of split-level Christianity. Instead of directing their energies towards building the spiritual lives of the people so that Christianity can penetrate deeply into the hearts and minds of the people, the church has given little time to this aspect of the ministry.

It is clear from what we have said above that the church needs to take a hard look at these methods of obtaining funds. Other means like making investments and undertaking some income-yielding projects need to be explored. This will also go a long way towards relieving the members of the heavy financial burden placed upon them. It may not be a good idea for the church to continue to rely solely on offerings obtained at worship services.

The method and manner of obtaining funds in the church suggests Christian stewardship has not been well understood so that members can contribute freely and generously without being lured to do so. Since God loves a cheerful giver, the people ought to be taught and encouraged to give cheerfully without complaining or murmuring. We are of the opinion that the church has given cause for people to think that it is more interested in their financial contribution than their spiritual needs. Several of my informants complained about the church emphasis on "money matters." One informant categorically stated that "These days if you don't have money you can't go to church because the church has become a money business." Obviously if the church is perceived this way it is likely to lose its witness and relevance.

The emphasis on money and failure on the part of some clergy to live exemplary lives have created an overwhelming suspicion about the clergy. Many people think that the clergy are in the ministry solely to earn a salary. Some of my informants were of the opinion that the ministry has become more of a career than a "call." They supported their position with the high incidence of financial malpractice and other vices reported among the clergy today. They have also witnessed some quarrels and division among the clergy. Such unnecessary quarrels and divisions spoil the effectiveness of their witness. A fragmented church cannot bring healing to a fragmented world. It must be noted that some years ago the ministers were prominent figures in the community. Today they are marginalized and given precious little respect.

One may be right in saying that the church in some respects is standing in the way of making Christianity relevant. Can we say then that the church itself has become part of the problem of split-level Christianity instead of becoming part of the solution?

The Church and Akan Life and Thought

Our primary concern here is to find out how far the church has gone in relating its message to Akan culture or life and thought. In introducing Christianity among the Akans no proper bridge was built between the old and the new. This has been one of the causes of the existence of split-level Christianity and why the average Akan's commitment to Christianity has been broad but not very deep.

It is our humble opinion based on our observation, that the church has not sought to seriously relate its message to traditional beliefs and practices. For example, it has been the practice of the church to dismiss any member found indulging in traditional practices. An informant who is a senior minister in the church told me of an incident at Koforidua where a leader of the church became sick and was taken to a traditional healer. As fate would have it, this leader died while receiving treatment at the traditional healer's shrine. The church refused to conduct a burial service for him because he was taken to a traditional healer.

There are several examples of such incidents where the church has been uncompromising in dealing with matters relating to traditional beliefs and practices. But in spite of the church's attitudes these beliefs and practices have persisted. Many members indulge in them secretly. There are several areas of the traditional life of the people in which the church has not been able to relate its message. We have noted many of them in chapter five. This will include the various rites of passage, Akan beliefs about sickness and death, and the various stresses of life that confront the Akan Christian.

Christian and Traditional Marriage

One important aspect of the life of the people which the church has not been able to relate its message to is the Akan concept of family. The church expects its members to marry in the Christian way which in most cases is a Western form of marriage. Whereas the Ghanaian society regards those married in the traditional way as having a valid marriage, the church frowns upon them as if they are only concubinage marriages until they are solemnized in the church.

Traditional marriage, however, in the minds of many Ghanaians is the **real marriage**. The ceremony in the church is not seen as a celebration of marriage but as satisfying the rule of the church and sometimes is used as an ostentatious display of wealth. Many members of the church are not keen

about the church marriage because it has become costly. It has often landed families in debt.

On the other hand, many members of the church are not willing to bring their marriages to the church for blessings for other reasons. Some of them include the following:

(1). Since children are essential to African marriage many church members are afraid to enter into this type of marriage which according to the church's teaching is indissoluble and which neither guarantees them children nor permits taking another wife to ensure the bearing of children.¹²

(2). Because the Akans are a matrilineal society, the belief is that Church marriage interferes with their inheritance system, in the sense that church marriage is also marriage under the English law. It gives the wife and children the right of inheritance to the property of the husband or father. This would upset their matrilineal social system. The government of Ghana has issued a decree to have all traditional marriages registered but people have found it difficult to comply because of this very reason.

Obstacles to Indigenization

Several obstacles have stood in the way of any serious engagement of Christianity with the traditional religion in a creative way. These include some of the inherited traditions of the church. Dickson (1991) sees this as **exclusivistic tendencies** in the church (excluding other cultures and traditions)

which contradicts the very concept of mission which is the church's *raison d'être*. One would say that the roots of this exclusivism lie within the interpretation and application of Old Testament Judaism and the historic Christian faith as taught by the early apostles through to the Reformation.

Church Creeds and Polity

The traditional creeds inherited by the church in some respect prevent a serious engagement with the culture of the people. Dickson has argued that:

The church in Africa, as elsewhere in the Third World, inherited creeds which arose when it was necessary for the early church to safeguard its faith from what were seen as dangerous influences... However, important though creeds have been, it is a fact that in the context of our time creeds have the effect of isolating the church from culture. (1991:86)

Our view is that as much as the creeds are important in laying down the basic Christian beliefs, e.g. about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, they often present some problem for the Akan Christian. The problem here is that these creeds were formulated at historical situations and circumstances which were quite unrelated to African life and thought. The preoccupation of the formulators of the Nicene Creed in 325 AD as Andrew Walls (1982:94) has noted is with "the application of another set of words to Jesus." Walls further observes that:

The dominant factors which the outsider notices as a characteristic of these Christians are the concern with metaphysics and theology, an intense intellectual scrutiny, an attempt to find precise significance for the precise terms. (1982:94)

The plain truth is that some of the language and concepts in the creeds are alien. In formulating the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds the early church fathers were obliged to use concepts and ideas from the Greek and Roman culture. For example, they used the Greek concept *homo-ousios* (similar substance) and the Latin concept *persona* (person) to explain the idea of three persons in one God. These were meant to make them intelligible to those societies that then constituted the Christian world.

If modern theologians in the West continue to struggle to make sense out of these basic Christian beliefs as set forth in the creeds, then one should appreciate how the average Akan Christian will have a hard time understanding them. And yet members of the church are made to memorize and recite these creeds at every Sunday worship, giving the impression that they understand all about the Christian faith.

It must be noted the Akans are not so much concerned about the "Trinity." They are interested in a religion that provides them with ultimate answers to their deepest longings and helps them to cope with the various stresses of life. It is our contention that by being faithful to the inherited traditions of the church, the Methodist Church has failed to engage the Christian faith meaningfully with Akan life and thought.

The irony is that in formulating these creeds, like the Nicene and Apostles' creeds, the authors were obliged to use concepts and ideas from the Roman and Greek culture to make them intelligible to their immediate

audience. As we have noted Greek and Latin concepts were all used to make sense out of the idea of three persons in one God. The church has not found it necessary to do the same for the African context. Perhaps an African Creed such as the one proposed by Vincent Donovan (1978:200) will be more meaningful to the African than the traditional formulations.

Some of the ideas and concepts are so alien to the African and hardly understood as they were meant to be when they were first formulated. Again, since they are meant to be accepted by the church without questioning they prevent the Christian faith from engaging the world outside the church.

Methodist Tradition

Another obstacle is the denominational background of the church. The church was planted according to the familiar pattern of British Methodism. There has always been a tendency to preserve the inherited tradition. The hard fact of life which works against renewal is that people resist change. People quickly fall into a set of habit patterns which work against innovation, "We have always done it this way" is a familiar refrain. The Methodist Church in Ghana itself is part of the world wide Methodist family. For this reason it has tried to maintain the Methodist tradition. For example the head of the church is still call president because the British call theirs by that name.

The denominational apron string to which the church is tied often prevents it from being innovative. Attempts to change are often resisted by

some clergy and laity who think things should be done in the same old way. They are afraid to adopt something which is not "Methodist". The expression *onnye Methodistfo hen ntoyee* (it is not our tradition as Methodists) has frequently been used to resist changing of any form or structure in the church. The church must choose between patterning its polity after the British Methodist Church or developing one of its own suitable to the Akan context.

Negative Views About Traditional Religion and Culture

Another obstacle to indigenize comes primarily from the negative view people have about culture. Through some of the negative polemics and injunction against participation in the traditional culture people have been brought to believe that the traditional culture and religion are sinful and that any thing associated with them must be avoided. For this reason some members of the church do not want to have anything to do with the traditional world from which they have emerged.

There is fear that this will lead to a return to the traditional religion. Some good elements in the traditional culture which will enliven and enrich Christian worship are neglected for this same reason. Efforts to introduce drumming and dancing into the church have been met with resistance from some members of the clergy and laity.¹³ But since these were introduced it has helped to minimize the exodus of members to the African Independent Churches.

We hold the view that the gospel message cannot be compromised but we recognize that in terms of missionary methods this has caused some problems. It blinds us to the good things in other people's religion, some of which can enhance the Christian faith. At its worst it has led to an attitude of ethnocentrism to those who bring the gospel to other people. It is important that we see the existence of religious experience among people as something positive. This implies that the people are somehow open to the supernatural, or to God.

The uniqueness of Christianity should not be interpreted in a way that Akan Christians have to deny their cultural identity. The church must of necessity take a clue from the attitude of Christ with reference to culture. This will serve as a solid base in setting about any proposal in making the church indigenous.

Christ honored all cultures by entering fully into Jewish social and religious life with all its traditions. Jesus was first and foremost a Jew; he did not deny his Jewish identity but sought to present his message within the Jewish context. This we think is the essence of the incarnation and basis of an incarnational approach to ministry. It appears the church has held tenaciously to the doctrine of incarnation but has not appropriated its real meaning for itself.

The negative view towards traditional religion and culture is reflected in hostility between anthropology and theology. As Schreiter has noted:

The initial contact between cultural anthropology and Christianity was not a friendly one. Cultural anthropology saw any form of religious belief as ultimately illusory and wrong minded; Christianity recognized the challenge that anthropology's exposure of cultural diversity presented to its claims of absoluteness and universality. Even though the tone of the conversation between anthropology and Christian faith is less shrill today, the echoes of that past have not completely faded away. (1991:286)

The old tension between anthropology and theology appears to be alive and well even though there is now a greater appreciation for the variety of cultures worldwide. Christians who have taken the culture seriously and are making honest attempts to make the Christian faith relevant within their culture are often branded as liberals. For example, in 1987 the church appointed a committee to look into the question of polygamy and the Lord's Supper. The committee made a recommendation that polygamists must be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. In a synod discussion following the committee's report some were very critical about the report because of what they thought to be liberal tendencies in the report. In the end the church voted to continue with the existing practice of not allowing polygamists to participate in the Lord's Supper. The chairman of the committee resigned because of the way the committee was perceived for their frank view on this matter.

The church continues to struggle with the issue of whether polygamists can be served the Lord's Supper. One might question the scriptural justification for the practice of admitting polygamous converts into the church

and accepting their financial contributions but not admitting them to the communion service. The church, following the European missionaries, accepts monogamy as the proper norm of marriage.¹⁴ The crucial question is whether the church regards polygamy as a state of marriage or a state of adultery. Among the Akans, polygamy is an accepted type of marriage, and is not classified as adultery. Marriage is a union of a man and a woman, as husband and wife, provided the appropriate traditional rites have been performed.

Associated with the church's attitude towards traditional marriage is the requirement that people who are married ought to have their marriages solemnized in the church before they can hold any office in the church. Here again the Methodist Church has been more legalistic, thus allowing law and rules to replace grace and liberty in a situation where traditional religion plays an important role in life. Surely the gospel does consist of rules and regulations and when legalism plays an important part in church life it cannot but result in distorted understanding of the Christian message.

This attitude of the church again sounds exclusivistic and similar to the judaizing influence of the Jerusalem church. The ultimate aim of these rules and regulations are geared towards discouraging traditional practices with less consideration for the social solidarity inherent in the traditional religion. It makes sense to say that instead of seeking to destroy the traditional society the church should rather seek to transform it by the power and love of Christ.

Lack of Effective Christian Education

An examination of the teaching ministry of the church shows a lack of effective Christian education for both new and old members. This raises some concern because it contributes in no small way towards the existence of split-level Christianity. The church has been receiving members into its fold and new members are baptized and confirmed without adequate preparation. This means that there are a number of people in the church who lack adequate knowledge about Christianity and how their daily lives are affected by it.

Our research reveals that confirmation classes are done by leaders who have very little training. The pastor comes in only to conduct the confirmation service. The course of instruction also leaves much to be desired. It normally consists of learning some Scripture verse, the creed, the Lord's prayer and the responses to the liturgy. There is no effective teaching on the Christian faith. Thus many people are baptized without adequate knowledge about the Christian faith. The baptism and confirmation services have become a diploma attesting ceremony where members are awarded diplomas declaring that they know more about God and the Christian faith. The obvious result of this is that the experiences of conversion or readiness for admission to full membership in the church is interpreted as being able to recite the articles of faith. Is it any wonder then that people who are full members of the church, and yet have no serious commitment to the Christian faith, lead a split-level Christian life?

The Class System

Following the Wesleyan tradition, the congregations are divided into classes under class leaders who are supposed to be teachers and shepherds of groups. The Methodist Church has traditionally used the class system in teaching the Bible. The problem here is dearth of Christian education materials for members and class leaders who teach. The church has no press of its own to produce Christian education material. The class leaders are not given the necessary training to enhance their effectiveness.

In many of the churches some of the class leaders lack the necessary qualification to be Christian leaders. Some are appointed because of their social position rather than by merit. In some churches leaders with the necessary qualifications are just hard to come by. Another problem with these leaders is that some of them consider their position as a life long appointment and are not willing to give way to more efficient ones even when they are old. Attempts by some ministers to change them have brought some conflict between these leaders and the pastors. In the rural areas some of the class leaders are illiterate and this obviously affects their effectiveness.

The practice of receiving new members and converts without proper teaching and lack of effective Christian education for those who are already in the church is a serious weakness in the church's ministry. The obvious implication is that people have no proper information about the Christian faith. They are not brought to the knowledge of the truth which is able to set them

free (John 8:32) from the fears, and evil powers inherent in the traditional religion.

A minister I interviewed affirmed that because there is lack of teaching, the church suffers from spiritual kwashiorkor, a disease which is a result of malnutrition. My informant compared the church to a normal body and was of the opinion that because the church is not feeding the body well the people suffer from spiritual malnutrition.

Again with the education of the youth and children, the church has not exerted itself sufficiently with regard to nurturing them in the Christian faith. Many of the churches have no graded classes.¹⁵ Some churches particularly in the rural areas do not conduct children services.

Mission and Evangelism

Granted that evangelism and mission is the number one task of the church, then we need to ask, to what extent has the church taken the question of mission and evangelism seriously? It could be said that most churches appear to focus their activities on maintaining their organization rather than being actively involved in mission and evangelism in the cities and rural areas.

The task of the church in evangelism is to bring others into a vital relationship with God and the fellowship of the church. The church has been given the command to take Christ to the market place. But instead of reaching out to others with the gospel the practice in many churches is to sit in the

church and invite others to its fellowship. Individual members of the church are not given the necessary training to witness about their faith. Even though the church believes in the priesthood of all believers it has not actively sought to put this into practice except with the class leaders and local preachers. It seems to me that the pastors have not seen their role as equipping people to go out to witness about their faith to others.

The church has traditionally relied on camp meetings and revival meetings as a means of evangelism. This approach of witnessing has a long history in Methodism. It was introduced into Ghana by Freeman, the architect of Methodism in Ghana, and has been used a lot by the church. The camp meetings has nothing to do with pitching a camp on a field on a nice summer day. The services are normally held in the open air. It is an annual event which usually lasts for three days, from Friday evening to Sunday evening. The purpose of the camp meeting is two-fold: to seek the spiritual renewal of members and win new members into the church. Thus missionaries used this as one of their methods of evangelism. The Methodist Churches continue to use them today, but it is not used with the same intensity as before.

Some of the churches participate in the New Life For All program. This is an evangelism and church planting program sponsored by the Ghana Evangelism Committee. Individual churches and congregations are mobilized to reach out or bring others into the fellowship of the church. Unfortunately many pastors do not show keen interest in this program. The comments of

some pastors during discussions on this program at conferences shows that many of them think that it is an outside program being imposed upon the church by people who are not even pastors.

The efforts of most congregations to take Christ to the market place has not been very intensive. Little has been done in the area of evangelism. Even though the church has been commissioned to take the gospel to the world, much of the preaching of the Word takes place in the church and not outside the church where "sinners" can be found. The sense of the Great Commission seems to have been lost in the church and yet it is its *raison d'être*. This loss of commitment to the "Great Commission" has been noted long ago by Rev. F. C. F. Grant, past president of the Methodist Church, Ghana. Addressing the conference of the church in Kumasi in 1963, he lamented:

Brethren I am not satisfied with our slow and feeble gathering of converts. Our fathers increased in numbers at a more rapid rate than modern political parties. And they were thorough in their efforts to win souls. People join us almost by chance, even members of our family neglect the church and do not come into its fellowship. (Methodist Church Ghana 1963:5)

Rev. Grant made the same lamentation in his presidential address to the 1964 Annual Conference at Sekondi:

We must examine how to increase our impact on our evangelizing agencies and to improve their efficiency, a study of our numerical returns make me deeply disturbed. (Methodist Church Ghana 1964:4)

The Ghana Evangelism Committee in a survey of the churches in Brong Ahafo and Eastern Regions of Ghana in 1987 reported that "the Methodist and

Presbyterian Churches which pioneered Christianity in both regions are loosing ground to new denominations in particular the Independent Churches" (1987:55).

Another evidence that evangelism has not been a priority of the church is that many congregations do not have evangelism in their budgets. Many have devoted more resources and energy to building projects such as chapels and manses instead of bringing people into the Kingdom of God. The minister's effectiveness is often measured by the number of projects accomplished.

What has been noted above is an indication that evangelism has not been a top priority of the church. Since the church has not given serious attention to this important ministry of teaching and discipline its members is it any wonder that the Christian faith has not penetrated deeply into the life of many of the church members?

We must note with appreciation the pioneering work of Rev Paul Adu as the first indigenous missionary to an unreached peoples group in the Northern part of Ghana.¹⁶ The church has also sent some ministers to serve as missionaries in other parts of Africa. But more needs to be done in this area. Perhaps the time has come for the church to set apart "as seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit" some of their members, both laity and clergy, for missionary work in the same way as the church overseas has sent missionaries abroad.¹⁷

There are still some neglected and unreached peoples and linguistic groups in the country. The church will do well to identify these groups and make efforts to reach them. Again there are some circuits and societies which could be easily regarded as mission stations. Unfortunately the feeling has been created in the church that ministers appointed to these places are being punished. These circuits have been regarded as "punishment areas." The practice has been to appoint ministers with problems to those place. Such ministers would naturally not give their best if they see themselves as being punished while others are enjoying ministry in other places.

The idea of a Home Missionary Corps to recruit Ghanaian lay and clergy to volunteer to join this corps and work in designated mission areas as proposed by the 1990 Annual Conference of the church is a step in the right direction. Those volunteers would however require some training.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter we have taken a look at the life and ministry of the Ghana Methodist Church, today under national leadership. From the evidence adduced so far it is clear that the present church has contributed in no small way towards the problem of split level-Christianity. Again the church has been left with a legacy which it is faithfully trying to preserve.

We will venture to say that there has been very little change in its form and organization since the missionaries left. There appears to have been an

uncritical acceptance of the form of Christianity that was introduced by the missionaries. The Methodist Church, Ghana, has become more like the parent church in Britain with very little adaptation to the local situation.

The problem of split-level Christianity has resulted partly from the nature and form of Christianity introduced by the Western missionaries. There is therefore the urgent need for the church to be delivered from its bondage to Western culture. This is necessary if Christianity is to become authentic and of challenging relevance in the Akan society. The task of the church and indeed any mission endeavor is to contextualize the gospel, incarnating it within all people and all cultures so that the gospel will be of relevance to human life.

Our presentation so far has been more critical of missionaries and pastors of the church today. Again we have concerned ourselves more with the Methodist Church, Ghana. But what we have observed about the Methodist Church is equally true about the other missionary established churches. Our aim has been to discover possible causes of split-level Christianity. We now move from the negative critique towards suggesting positive solutions and outcomes. This leads to our final chapter where we will offer some proposals to make the church a vital element within the Akan community.

End Notes

1. The Head office of the church can barely meet its budget and has always to rely on foreign funds. To solve this problem an endowment fund campaign was launched in 1992.
2. The above statistics are the official figures reported to the World Methodist Council in 1992. It is often very difficult to obtain accurate statistical figures of members because some of the societies do not keep accurate records. Again, some members have maintained double membership in the sense that while their names are maintained in their home churches as distant members, they are reported as members by the societies where they worship.
3. Biological growth occurs as children from Christian homes grow up in the faith and become communicant members. Transfer growth is growth by transfer from other congregations or when new families move into the area and transfer their membership.
4. The population of Ghana in 1960 was 6.5 million. The current population (1993) according to the latest statistical figures from the Ghana Bureau of Statistics is 15.8 million and is expected to rise to 36.6 million by the year 2000.
5. The church has recently set up an Evangelism Department headed by a missionary. The Evangelism program has not reached many churches.
6. Interview with Professor Max Assimeng May 12, 1992.
7. In the early days of the establishment of these churches the historic churches were very critical of their practices. It appears that they have been forced to adopt some of their practices because of its popularity among the masses.
8. The average length of church service lasts for 3 hours. Many churches go beyond this time especially when there is a special occasion.
9. Many parents have complained about the children not interested in going to church with them. They would rather go to some of the charismatic churches. Some churches, like the Calvary Methodist Church in Accra, realizing this problem have started to organize special worship services for the youth with the view of attracting them to the church.
10. This is quite in contrast to the situation in most western churches where all the announcements are found in the bulletin or made through the mails.

11. In the past those who were able to fulfill their financial obligations are given "tickets" which signified their good standing with the church. In the minds of many these tickets become somehow a passport to heaven. Family members will often place put these tickets in the coffin of a dead family member alongside the traditional items placed in the coffin. Presently when a member of the church dies, the family members will inquire if the deceased owes the church and fulfills that obligation on his or her behalf. I contend that it is morally wrong for the church to accept those payments from a bereaved family when it should be sympathizing with them.

12. This explains why most of the weddings conducted in the church are among couples who have been married for some time and have children.

13. In 1981 the Chairman of the District and Superintendent minister of Cape Coast had a confrontation with the Men's group in the church over the introduction of drumming and dancing in the church. Some members of the group who advocated the introduction of drums were dismissed from the church. The case later ended up at the courts.

14. It is important to note that the Protestant mission meeting in Le Loue, Belgium, in 1926 outlawed polygamy. This conference was convinced that Christian society must be built on Christian family life and that the ideal Christian family life can only be realized in monogamy.

15. The general problem with most of the church buildings is that they have not been designed to provide rooms for classes or Sunday schools. The average church building contains only a sanctuary for worship.

16. Rev. Paul Adu was honored posthumously with a citation at the Ghana Methodist Conference in 1992

17. The church has for some time sent some clergy to serve as missionaries to other African countries. But they have not actively pursued any mission policy.

CHAPTER 7

Towards a Solution to the Problem of Split-level Christianity

This study has provided empirical evidence for the fact that the phenomenon of split-level Christianity in the form of the persistence of traditional religious beliefs and practices is a basic problem facing Christianity among the Akans. This is true of many African societies. After several years of planting the church in Africa and the increasing growth in membership, Christianity appears to remain on the periphery of many people's lives.

An evaluation of the way Christianity was presented by missionaries and is being presented today by Akan pastors reveals some fundamental mistakes. There appears to be a missing link between the Christian faith and the religio-cultural life of the people. There is a need for Christianity to be interpreted and applied in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the Akans. It is hoped that Christianity can become part and parcel of the daily lives of the people, instead of being a part of the dualism found among many members of the church. The ultimate aim is that the Akan can become truly Christian and truly Akan. We believe this can happen. The Akan religion and culture offer a fertile ground for the seed of Christianity to take root and grow and bear abundant fruit among the Akans.

The problem of split-level Christianity is far more complex than a statement of it can encompass and therefore demands a multifaceted solution.

In this chapter we offer some recommendations that we believe will be helpful in addressing the problem.

Relating Christianity to Daily Life

Akans do not separate religion from their daily lives. This means that for any religious innovation to be successful, it must not make a distinction between religion and social life. Christianity must therefore be presented in a way that relates it to the daily lives of the people. As Edwin Smith (1930:273) noted long ago, "The pagan African is eminently religious and carries his religion into all his activities. If Christianity is to be true to his genius and meet his needs it too must be infused into all his life."

This traditional sacred-secular dichotomy inherited from the West needs to be broken. For the church to be culturally relevant it must relate its message to the whole of life. The church needs to engage in a holistic ministry to reflect the Akan holistic view of life at the grass-roots otherwise there is the danger of it becoming irrelevant. Western theology with its logical presentations seem to be out of touch with the real holistic world of the Akans. Their deepest felt needs and questions are often not addressed.

Meeting People's Felt Needs

The church must engage in a ministry and outreach that focuses on meeting the needs and providing answers to questions people are asking

rather than pursuing its own agenda. Thus it must be a market-driven church which focuses on people and their needs. In the present situations, the people increasingly turn to a selective use of elements of Christianity, giving preference to those aspects which respond to their hopes and fears.

We must however be careful not to allow the "felt needs" of the people to set our agenda and neglect the spiritual dimension of human needs which may not be consciously felt. People have "unfelt needs" which include the need to experience God's forgiveness and enjoy a right relationship with him because God created us for fellowship with him. The danger is our "felt needs" can often obscure those deepest hidden longings of humankind.

To the Akan religion is useful in as much as it helps in providing answers to problems they face in daily life as well as material needs. One observes that prayers offered in the traditional religion are full of petitions for material blessings. We must not be quick to accuse the Akans of using religion for material ends, or having a narrow understanding of salvation. It appears that the Akans have taken the Latin saying *mens sana in corpore sana* (a sound mind in a sound body) seriously. They do not see salvation only in terms of saving souls but the body as well. Religion to them embraces all of life. Surely a certain modicum of material comfort is necessary for progress in the spiritual realm. The apparent lack of interest by the church in the material needs and daily life of the people has given the impression that what the Akans expect religion to provide for them cannot be found in Christianity.

The task of the church must be to relate Christianity to the daily life of the people. Akans must therefore be led to understand that God is interested in every aspect of their lives. Most importantly, he provides answers to the fears and insecurities inherent in the traditional religion. We are convinced that Christianity can satisfy all the religious needs and aspirations of the Akans. The church must allow this to happen. Rightly presented and understood, Christianity is capable of meeting the Akans at the point(s) of their greatest need, providing them with ultimate answers to their longings and effective ways of coping with the persistent problems in life. We are convinced that Jesus is able to satisfy all the longings of the human heart. If Akan Christians can be helped to realize that Christianity is all-sufficient, the desire to turn to the traditional system will be minimized.

For the Akan, religion is not just a well-constructed system of truths demanding belief and acceptance but a lived experience. Salvation is seen both in the material and spiritual planes. This implies that Christianity should be presented to them as not merely a system of truths to be accepted but which also takes care of the life experiences of the people.

We must also point out that in the Akan holistic view of life, there are times when it appears that undue emphasis is placed on the spiritual powers. This emphasis on the spiritual powers and material aspects of salvation may be regarded as the greatest weakness in Akan's religious understanding of salvation. Akans have been unduly concerned about the present and material

aspects of salvation. It could be argued that many who flock to the African Independent Churches do so to obtain material blessings.

Through effective teaching they should be helped to understand that the purpose in serving God is not purely for material gains and meeting of present needs. This said, however, we must also recognize that God's purpose for humanity is to experience life in all its abundance (John 10:10). The Akan view of life or salvation could be an important corrective to the popular notion of salvation which limits it only to the spiritual aspect and not to daily life.

The Need for Spiritual Renewal

The problem of split-level Christianity can be dealt with not only by indigenizing Christianity. A program of spiritual renewal is also needed in the church. This is because sin is transcultural. We have observed earlier that Christianity among the Akans can be described as very broad but not deep in the sense that it has not penetrated into the core culture of the Akan society. In spite of the obvious gains of Christianity, there is still much to do to secure a solid planting of the gospel among contemporary church members. Akan Christians must be helped to move beyond their general knowledge and belief in God to a much deeper personal experience with God.

Emmaus Walk Program as a Model of Ministry

One program that can help meet this need is the Emmaus Walk. It is a model of ministry of discipleship which could be adopted and adapted as part of the solution to the problem. Emmaus is a movement of renewal designed to give participants opportunity to experience the overwhelming sense of God's love, and encounter the risen Christ in a life transforming way. The hope is for the individual to experience a new sense of direction and power for living the life of grace. In a sense Christian history is the story of how people of various races, classes, and genders and ages have encountered on their own Emmaus road Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, buried and raised from the death and is now exalted as Lord and Christ. Here is where I find the relevance of the Emmaus Program. Crandall (1991) has identified the vision of Emmaus as threefold:

1. Developing Christian leaders. Christians who are active members of the church are gathered for a three day weekend. During this time talks are given on what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Pilgrims are challenged to take on the disciplines of piety, study and action for the rest of their lives.
2. Strengthening the local congregation. Participants are encouraged to return to their local churches and continue to offer themselves in service to congregations. Participants or "pilgrims" as they are called are expected to take back their understanding of a life marked by piety, study, and action.

They bring home a renewed energy for loving God, and neighbor, and a revitalized desire to offer sacrificial love within the church.

3. Christianizing the environment. Pilgrims are encouraged to return to their homes, work-places, schools, and neighborhood and be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, whose light must shine through their words and deeds.

The missiological relevance of the Emmaus program lies in the fact that it goes beyond bringing renewal in the church. It is inter-racial, and inter-denominational and so helps to break down the barriers and divisive tendencies that exist in the body of Christ. This occurs as all are brought to the same table to discuss and share their common faith. Above all no distinction is made between the clergy and the laity.

Having participated in this program myself, I am convinced that the program can help the church in fulfilling its mission to the Akans. Like the disciples on the Emmaus road, many are in the church who are discouraged and disillusioned and have various spiritual needs. They need to experience the transforming presence of Jesus Christ who alone can meet their needs and offer them hope and insights for living. As we have noted earlier Christianity has not penetrated deeply into the lives of many Akan Christians. The Emmaus program can help in the church's task of nurturing people to become strong committed disciples. As people participate in the walk they may have some life changing experiences which can lead to a deeper commitment to the Christian faith. Again since there is the need for all persons to grow in their

spiritual life, we think the Emmaus walk will be of immense help to the church in this all important task of helping people in their spiritual growth.

Spirituality of the Pastors.

The need for spiritual renewal is not only for the church members. The ministers need it as well in order to be effective in their ministry. There is an Akan saying that *erotu egyinamboa fo no na erotu okura so fo* meaning while the cat is being advised the mouse must be advised as well. It must be pointed out that if Christianity should become a living experience, the pastors must set the pace, and become a worthy example and model to follow.

With the heavy load and responsibilities placed on them, pastors have often neglected their personal Bible study and prayer. I myself have experienced some spiritual dryness at a certain stage in my ministry. I found myself reading the Bible merely in search of sermons and praying only during church services and social gatherings.

The pastors need to stay in touch with God and their original calling and devote much time to the spiritual aspects of the work instead of devoting much time to fund-raising. I would not doubt that this experience of spiritual dryness is true about other ministers. This can surely hinder their effectiveness in feeding their flocks. They need to be endowed with power from on high to do their work. It is essential for minister who continually **give out** the Word to also **take in** the word, replenishing themselves with a steady

spiritual diet. We suggest that pastors work into their crowded schedule a retreat every month to renew their spirits. Again we are convinced that the Emmaus Walk program will be very useful for the pastors.

Taking the Akan Worldview Seriously

The problem of split-level Christianity among the Akans stems largely from the historical context in which the religious encounter has taken place. The missionary, and today the Akan minister, has frequently failed to understand the worldview or the underlying presuppositions of the people. It needs to be pointed out that the fact that Akan Christians hold on to both levels of religion is indicative that there is some value in both. This implies that one cannot act now as the missionaries of old, who regarded everything in the Akan religion as "pagan" and from the devil.

The Akans are already in tune with the spiritual world. According to the Akan worldview they believe in *Nyame* or the Supreme Being and other supernatural powers such as the lesser deities and evil spirits. Most of the religious practices are meant to secure the favor and protection of the spirits which can influence human lives. The Akan sense of the sacred and the supernatural should therefore be a rich potential which the church should recognize in building the spiritual life of the people. As it is, the Christian faith is yet to come to grips with the Akan traditional worldview. There is therefore a compelling need to understand the worldview of the people so that

Christianity can be presented in a way that is relevant. As Busia said so well over thirty years ago:

For the conversion to the Christian faith to be more than superficial, the Christian church must come to grips with the traditional beliefs and practices, and with the world view that these imply. (1955:1)

Fortunately certain Christian concepts have similarity with Akan beliefs. The following are a few examples: the Christian doctrine of God as the creator, the doctrine of death and eternal life, the doctrine of the communion of saints, and the role of Christ as the mediator, and the possibility of the faithful departed participating in this unique mediatorship. All this is related to Akan beliefs about death and the ancestors. These Christological issues need to be explored in the Akan context because of their similarity with the Akan worldview. For example the ancestors could be regarded as part of the church militant. As to whether they are in heaven with God or not, we can safely leave it in the hands of God.

We are not calling for an uncritical acceptance of the traditional worldview. Our attempt to understand the Akan worldview must not override our first duty to introduce Christ to the people. But instead of rejecting these beliefs outright we must use the process of critical contextualization as Hiebert (1987) has proposed.

Working Towards an Akan Church

The driving force for this study comes from the clarion call to contextualize the Christian faith. The Christian faith by its very nature has been foreign to every culture even in the land of its birth. There is therefore the urgent need to search for ways of making the Christian faith find a "comfortable home" in the Akan cultural milieu.

The church is more or less a potted plant in the Akan soil as indeed in every mission field. For this potted plant to be rooted and grounded in the Akan soil and become indigenous, the form of its expression must be influenced by the cultural setting in which the people live. The Christian faith must therefore come to grips with the traditional religion and culture so that something new can emerge which will be fully Christian and fully Akan.

The church in Africa can no longer remain a xerox copy or branch of the British or American church that planted it. For a long time the Methodist Church has operated in the same manner as the British Methodist Church. We need to de-westernize Christianity and undress it of all foreign cultural elements that are not necessarily part of the gospel. For example, we need to understand what is the integral part of the gospel message and what is simply Western culture.

It is also important to note that a right understanding of the context of the Old and New Testament is important in order to interpret it to people of another culture. For example, we must be able to sort out what in the Old and

New Testament was essential to Christianity and what was simply Hebrew or Greek culture. All this calls for a reconceptualization of the Christian message in an Akan context so that Christianity can be authentic, indigenous, and relevant. To do this effectively church leaders need to become like cultural anthropologists and obtain extensive information of people so we can interpret the gospel within those cultures.

The general background of the Akan traditional religious beliefs and practices has furnished us with a framework on which to operate in making use of the salient aspects of the culture in an attempt to indigenize the Christian faith. We believe that the Akan religion and culture offer a fertile ground for the seed of Christianity to take root and grow and bear abundant fruit among the Akans.

There are some good and potential elements in the Akan culture which should serve as a solid foundation for the indigenization of the Christian faith. As Ghunney has advised:

Whatsoever is noble (in the Akan culture), whatsoever is right (in the Akan culture), whatsoever is pure in the (Akan culture), whatsoever is lovely (in the Akan culture), whatsoever is admirable (in the Akan culture), if anything is excellent or praiseworthy (in the Akan culture), think about such things (and use them for the good of the Akan). (1993:96)

The approach we are proposing may not be welcomed by all because there is often the fear of syncretism or theological liberalism. But such fears should not prevent us from making Christianity relevant to those receiving the gospel message. What we are proposing is far from trying to save the

traditional religion. Christianity certainly makes a judgement of all cultures because every culture contain some sinful elements. Christianity cannot adopt wholesale everything in a people's culture. There are certain aspects of Akan culture which can be described as non-Christian and must be given up for the sake of the gospel. But what is simply culture can remain for the sake of continuity, stability, and identity.

In making these proposals we have drawn some insights from Barnett's theory that innovation takes place when there is a recombination of old and new ideas. It must be understood that for a successful innovation to take place the Akans must be able to interpret Christianity in terms of their preexisting religion. We need to develop an adequate Christian response to some of the Akan traditional rites such as those connected with the ancestral cult which have been tenacious. This could be achieved by studying and analyzing those traditional rites and ceremonies associated with them and providing a Christian substitute.

We agree that it is not easy to decide which ideas can be accepted into a new Christian context, and which practices have redeeming value or which presuppositions can be reconciled to Christian faith, but this should not prevent us from any creative engagement with the traditional religion. It is therefore important that this is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Traditional Feasts and the Church Year

We have observed that many Akans participate in certain rites and so live split-level lives. To make the Akans feel more at home, we suggest that some functional substitutes be provided for some of the traditional feasts which are regularly observed. For example, there are feast days that are related to the ancestors like *ahobaa* and *odwira*.

Among the Fantes, particularly those living in the rural areas, the *Ahobaa* festival is celebrated in two parts- *Ahobaa Kuma* (Little Ahobaa) and *Ahobaa Kese* (Big Ahobaa). The former is a commemoration held in May or June of all those in the tribe who have died during the year.

The latter is held in August or September and serves as a tribute of thanksgiving to the gods and ancestors for protection and plentiful harvest.

The church could incorporate these festivals into church observances and celebrate the two festivals as "All Saints Day" and "Thanksgiving Day" respectively? On such days the church could organize services in remembrance of the dead, or give thanks to God for all his mercies and bounty and invite the whole community to take part. These services could be held in the open air and the whole community invited to participate. It could provide an opportunity to evangelize the community.

It must also be pointed out that no society easily forgets about their dead; they are remembered in one way or another. To ask the Akans to forget all about their dead is simply unrealistic. Christians in the West will often put

flowers on the graves of their dead relatives. The Akans have also a way of remembering their dead, such as the *Ahobaa* festival. Since the ancestors feature prominently in Akan life and thought, it is important that a way is found in dealing with them without necessarily worshipping them or placing too much trust or fear in their powers.

We must not be misunderstood as advocating for extreme accommodation of all elements in the Akan religion. Some of the elements in the Akan culture, though they may not be intrinsically bad, are intertwined with false worship and beliefs that render them incompatible with Christian faith. What we are suggesting here is that some of these traditional rites and ceremonies can be purified, and purged of all that is repugnant to Christian ethics and gracefully incorporated into the church life.

The purpose of the incarnation demands that Christ penetrate every culture of a people in order to transform them into God's children. The Christian doctrine of incarnation should therefore not be a theological doctrine but something that occurs in our practice of ministry.

We must acknowledge that some of things we are proposing will not be an easy task. Some serious theological reflection would be needed before some of the Akan practices could be incorporated into the life of the church. Nevertheless this should not prevent us from implementing some of these suggestions.

It seems to me that those who oppose any adoption of some of the elements in the traditional religion have forgotten how in the history of the church Christianity has borrowed other religious ideas to make its message relevant. Some of the festivals celebrated by the church today like Christmas and Easter, were originally "pagan" festivals.

Traditional Marriage

Concerning traditional marriage rites, we recommend that the church should Christianize them. We do not see the need for persons to be married twice especially when the Christian marriage in church is more or less a Western form of marriage. The traditional marriage and the Christian marriage should be harmonized.

What we are suggesting is in line with Jesus' own view of mission, "I came not to destroy but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus spoke of not putting new wine into old wine-skin (Mark 2:22). But in his miracle at Cana he showed how the new wine of the gospel was a transformation of the water of the old dispensation. He did not ignore or abolish the Decalogue, he fulfilled it by spiritualizing it (E. Smith 1930:261).

We suggest that the church should be present at the traditional marriage ceremony. Instead of a subsequent church marriage or wedding, we propose that the couple come to church to give thanks to God and be prayed for and supported by the church family. A special liturgy can be developed for this

occasion different from the present order of service for the solemnization of marriage.

Such a liturgy should take into consideration certain elements in the traditional custom. For example, we consider it not appropriate for the minister to say "I pronounce thee as husband and wife" when they have already been pronounced as such in the traditional way. Again according to Akan custom it is not the minister who gives someone in marriage. Reference should be made in the liturgy of the contracting families and the responsibility they bear for the success of the marriage. Again since the desire for children is uppermost in any Akan marriage, the liturgy should include a prayer asking for children.¹

Similarly the traditional naming ceremony and puberty rites could be incorporated into the Christian rites of infant baptism and confirmation respectively.² Again since people indulge in traditional widowhood rites or *kunaye* because of the fear associated with it, the church would do well to provide a Christian substitute. This will go a long way toward allaying their fears.

This has been somehow a brief and inadequate reflection of some of the aspects of traditional beliefs and practices which could be incorporated into the church. An indepth research is needed to come up with some theologically sound solutions. Our aim is to generate more discussion and reflection in the

spirit of love and understanding in this important task of making the Christian message culturally relevant and integrated into the daily lives of the Akans.

The process of relating Christianity to an African setting has assumed diverse expressions. The terms "Africanization," "inculturation," "adaptation," "indigenization," etc. have been used. Missiologists are now inclined to use the term "contextualization." In the final analysis, indigenization should aim at encouraging indigenous self awareness and creating a church where people will feel at home in worshipping God and remaining faithful to Christ. At present, the Akan Christian struggles to be like Europeans or Americans, denying his or her Africaness, and yet that issue keeps emerging and refuses to die. The fact is, we are products of different cultures, and God respects our human diversity. The church has been kept from indigenizing because of the fear that any closer engagement with the indigenous religion will result in the central message of the gospel being distorted.

We must not be understood to be advocating for an Akan church which is different from the universal church. The church in Africa belongs to the World Church which confesses the same faith and the same Lord, and care should be taken to avoid any domestication of the gospel or compromise of its message. As Wainwright has warned:

While indigenization is necessary on account of the Christian gospel to every culture, a concomitant danger is this particularization may be understood in such a way as to threaten the universal relevance of the gospel to all cultures. (1980:366)

There are certain biblical absolutes such as John 14:6 which speaks of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life that can never be sacrificed on the altar of cultural accommodation. What we are proposing has been well said by Edwin Smith long ago: "In the essential things let there be agreement, but in the forms which embody them, let there be variety" (1930:259).

Contribution of African Culture

We note however that discussions about contextualization have often focused on how Christianity can make use of the good things in a culture. The question of how those good things in that culture can influence or contribute to the expression of the Christian faith is often neglected. In some respect certain elements of Akan culture should be preserved to enrich Christianity, while being in turn enriched by Christianity. The problem is that African cultures have been and still are regarded by many as inferior. Consequently some of the richest elements in them have not been recognized.

It is time we begin to seriously ask the question "Has African culture any contribution to make to Christianity?" There is no doubt in my mind that Africa has much to contribute to Christianity. One such contribution is the joyfulness and exuberant participation that characterizes African worship. As Nketia has noted:

There is a greater freedom of movement, spontaneity and gaiety in indigenous African worship than one finds in most Christian churches, where the atmosphere is formal and where movement is restricted by the pews, alters and pulpits, indigenous worship

is often combined with drama, particularly the dance drama which is presented as a spectacle. (1962:114)

This is unlike worship in most Protestant churches in the West which can be better described as one-man-shows in which most of the worshipers are not actively involved. We know that one way Christian worship could be made more meaningful is for worshipers to participate rather than sit as passive spectators watching a few persons perform. Africans also make a lot of use of symbolic rituals as concrete expressions for their faith. This helps to enrich their worship and draw them closer to the object of worship. This is something that Protestantism can learn.

Making Use of Rituals

Akans have come from a religious background in which rituals play an important role. The whole pilgrimage of a human life from the womb to the tomb is marked by rituals. Thus there are special ceremonies connected with birth, puberty, marriage, death and the ancestors. Rituals also play a part in the life of the community especially during agricultural festivals.

The question is how far has the Christian message penetrated into these personal and social ceremonies which form so binding a part of the people's lives? Protestant tradition, especially evangelical Christianity, has stressed salvation through faith, and the inner experience of being "born again", more than outward expressions. The Methodist Church following the Protestant tradition tends to emphasize this inner experience of being "born again" more

than outward ritual. John Wesley's Aldersgate experience of a heart "strangely warmed" is often quoted as normative for every Methodist Christian.

Aldersgate Week May 18-24 is therefore an important week on the church's calendar.

I would think that outward rituals are equally important because they are an outward expression of an inward grace. Above all it is consonant with the spirituality of the Akans. I would again submit that too much emphasis on inner experience to the neglect of outward experience is not very helpful in the Akan context because of their religious background in which there is much emphasis on ritual activity. I also see this as the weakness of Protestant Christianity

The weakness of the Protestant movement is that in their efforts to reform all that was believed to be wrong with the Catholic Church they went overboard in discounting the importance of rituals and removing many images and symbols connected with worship. Protestant Christianity misses something important which ritual provides in enhancing the spiritual life of individuals. Victor Turner is said to have been converted to the value of ritual by the Africans (Ndembu). Ninian Smart has aptly observed the value of rituals in religion:

The importance of ritual in religion is like the importance of performative acts in social life... Religious ritual also conveys feelings of and relationships, and indeed often transfers an unseen reality from one sphere to another. (1983:131)

Through ritual acts, communication is often established with the Beyond or the Ultimate reality, and this must not be overlooked. In reality rituals have ultimate meaning in experience, they evoke feelings and help create visions.

Granted that some psychological factors may be involved in some of the life issues that confront people, it makes sense to conclude that some of these issues must also be confronted on the psychological level. Rituals can play a vital role in bringing relief to troubled persons. By merely handling or touching some religious objects, a person may be empowered to deal with a problem. Rituals have therefore some liberating power and we need to employ them in our Christian ministry. We contend that an emphasis on ritual performance in the church will go a long way toward helping Akans deal with some of the life crises in which they often revert to the traditional system.

Rituals have unique effectiveness in the sense that they often express more than words can. There is more to winning people to Christ than just appealing to their minds. People's hearts can often be touched not only by what is heard but by what is seen and touched. Rituals can therefore help people to experience the presence of the Ultimate reality. Some simple rituals like anointing with oil, sprinkling of blessed water in the name of Jesus, offertory as sacrifice, and a more ritually liturgical emphasis in the celebration of Holy Communion is likely to be more meaningful and appealing to Akan Christians.

what we are proposing is that the Akans are very used to drum language. The traditional talking drum is used to communicate messages and to sing the praises of chiefs, deities etc. It is also used to summon people to a gathering. We would suggest that during the celebration of the Eucharist the drums can be used to sing the praises of God. For example the drums can be beaten at appropriate point in the liturgy such as when the minister says "Holy, Holy, Holy." This will surely convey the feeling of awesomeness and help bring the people to the presence of God.

We recognize that ritual acts can be misinterpreted, and can degenerate into superstition; nevertheless, this should not prevent us from using them in making Christianity more relevant. Through teaching we should be able to guide against ritual acts being perceived as having "magical" power rather than symbols of the power of God.

The problem of such misrepresentation should not however prevent the church from innovating to make Christianity relevant. It could be overcome through education.

Confronting the Spiritual Powers

Conversion among the Akans should be seen as a power encounter because of their religious background in which spiritual powers play a major role. The threat of witchcraft, the power of *juju* or magic, and ancestral powers are basic concepts pervading the Akan worldview. As Alan Tippet

(1981:636) has aptly noted, people who come from a traditional religion "need a God who speaks and demonstrates power. The preaching of a purely ethical gospel is hardly to inspire such a people; but a life transformed by a God of power will lead to a new ethic."

It makes sense to say that stories in Mark in which Jesus is presented as a miracle performer or "a man of power" demonstrating his victorious power in casting out evil spirits, calming a storm, feeding the five thousand, etc. is meaningful to the Akans because it is consonant with their worldview in which human existence is a battleground of powers. The Western mind might tend to demythologize these miracles but to the Akan they are evidence of Jesus' power and proof that he is God's son.

By power evangelism we are also referring to spiritual warfare with evil supernaturalism such as casting out demons. The preaching of the gospel and pastoral practice of the church must take cognizance of the experience of power in the traditional religion. Considering the vastness of the African spirit world, the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer must be emphasized in order not to create a spiritual vacuum in the Akan.

The church has been given power to disarm principalities and powers. Paul Hiebert (1982:39) is right in observing that one of the weaknesses of the Christian mission is that it has failed to answer questions about spirit possession, curses, witchcraft, and magic-things that are so real in the experience of people. The church must therefore develop a holistic ministry

that seeks to respond to questions like evil spirits and demon possession. Part of the answer to these problems will not be in terms of rational argument but by power encounter (Hiebert 1982:45).

The spiritual world is very real to the Akans. Supernatural powers are believed to exert influence in the day-to-day lives of people. In any ministry to people with such a worldview it is important to stress and demonstrate Christ's triumph over the principalities and powers which undergird traditional beliefs.

We contend that signs and wonders should be seen as an essential part of evangelism. But we must also sound a note of caution about false perspectives toward power. People have often become Christians as an access to power rather than as a response to faith in the living God. Many Akans appear to have interpreted conversion in terms of an exchanging of the traditional system of power for the Christian one, and their traditional worldview has remained unchanged. Christian conversion should involve the enthroning of Christ at the center of a person's life and allowing him to control or be the Lord of every aspect of a person's life. Christian conversion should mean much more than a power encounter; it should also bring a change of worldview to the convert.

Power evangelism can therefore be seen as an effective method of touching the hearts of the people who come from the background of traditional beliefs. We are not implying here that healing, deliverance, and

doing other mighty works is what Christian ministry and preaching of the gospel should be all about. Nevertheless they are an essential part of it as they bring people to faith in God.

Another note of caution we would like to sound is the deception that often occurs through signs and wonders. Such gifts have often been abused within Christendom where signs, wonders, miracles, casting out demons—all performed in the name of Jesus—are taken as absolute guarantees of signs of the gifts or the Spirit or God at work. The other side is that power evangelism could have its counterfeit, else Jesus would not have warned about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15, 20-23).

Dealing With Crises and Vulnerability

During periods of crisis, Akans have sought refuge in religion as a way of dealing with particular crisis situations. During such times people feel vulnerable and insecure. The Akan is very much open to the traditional religion or to the new religious movements for answers to their needs, particularly when the cause of a crisis is believed to be *sunsum yareba* or spiritual, such as "curse" or "spell".³ Undoubtedly they do not only think in terms of the medical basis of their illness or problems. The traditional healers deal with *asetsena mu nsem*—all aspects of life which will include economic, social and spiritual crisis. It is during these times of crisis that the world view of the people becomes more apparent.

The church has tended to overlook the spiritual aspects of people's problems especially in matters concerning sickness and health. It makes sense to say that since humans are both spiritual and physical beings, there are spiritual dimensions to human problems which can only be solved spiritually or through prayer. For the Akans the spiritual aspects of human problems often denied or neglected by the church are very real. For this reason they will look for solutions outside the church since the church does not seriously address such issues.

Crisis situations often open people to new options. They also create disorientation in individual lives. Such crises should be seen as an opportunity for revitalization where myth, rituals, and symbols are rediscovered, and people are transformed and energies mobilized to create new possibilities.

We would think that the church should be more interested in the existential situation of the people and help them deal with them in an appropriate Christian manner. The church should become a refuge place for people wanting solutions to spiritual problems and dilemmas, such as dealing with diseases or illnesses regarded as spiritual, and learning how to protect themselves from evil forces.

Many Akans perceive the Christian God as "gentle, meek and mild," and impotent in dealing with problems considered as spiritual or *sunsum mu yareba*. As Imasogie (1983:69) has rightly observed, "Many African Christians perceive

the 'God of Christianity' as a 'stranger God,' the God of the White man who is unfamiliar with local spiritual problems."

The task of the church must be to help Akan Christians to look to God as **all powerful** and sufficient to meet all needs. The church must work to build confidence among the people that Jesus indeed satisfies and is sufficient for every need. Christianity has all the resources to deal with all the problems of life. Christ must not only be preached but his power to meet human needs must also be demonstrated.

Since spiritual healing is of a major concern to the Akans the church must takes steps to incorporate healing services into their activities. Any form of ministry which demonstrates God's power and ability to deal with human problems or crises, such as sickness, is likely to touch the core of the indigenous worldview. One way the church can do this is to organize more healing services and special prayer sessions so that people with all kinds of problems can be encouraged to bring them to the Lord.

We need to sound a word of caution here. If there is criticism that is often justifiably levelled at African Christianity, it is that many Christians have been more concerned about the benefits of Christianity in terms of solving human problems at the expense of the implication of the cross in the life of the believer. While the triumphs of Christianity need to be affirmed, its trials must also be acknowledged. Christianity must therefore not be seen as a bed of roses. But if it is we will remember that even roses have thorns. African

Christians must also know that there are not always instant solutions to life's vicissitudes. The Christian faith is not simply a problem solver, but a life changer.

Summary

In this chapter we have argued that the problem of split-level Christianity could be effectively dealt with if the church will come to a form of dialogue with the African culture, in this case the Akan culture. A fresh ministry approach to the Akans which takes into consideration the cultural background of the people is needed. This implies taking steps to rid the church of all the Western cultural trappings which are not necessarily Christian, and creating indigenous forms of liturgy, hymnody, worship, etc. In other words, the Christ event must be interpreted and explicated in African concepts and symbols. The goal is that the Akan Christian does not lose his or her identity but becomes truly Christian and truly Akan.

We have argued that until the church is able to do this, Christianity will remain superficial among the people or even be perceived as irrelevant. For the successful introduction of any change into a society, the cultural factors need to be taken seriously into consideration.

End Notes

1. For further discussion on this subject see Kwesi Dickson (1978b:434-441)
2. Dickson (1978b:434-438) has given some suggestions how the traditional naming rites could be incorporated into the Christian rites of baptism.

CHAPTER 8

Discovering and Recovering African Spirituality:

Some Missiological Implications of this Study

for the Methodist Church in Ghana.

This study has been an attempt to understand why traditional religious

Stewardship Education

The numerous appeals for funds present a stumbling block to the church's witness. This implies that there is the need for stewardship education so that people will understand it as their Christian duty to give their time, talents, and treasure to the glory of God rather than being coerced or pressured to do so. Again, the strength of the mission will obviously draw the money. The following areas of the congregational life need to be strengthened for they will naturally help to raise funds: specific mission objectives with which members can identify, visitation, corporate and dynamic worship, strong leadership, and solid participation in decision making to increase the giving of their members (Callahan 1992:5). When these are present in the church people will give joyfully to the Lord.

Implications for Liturgical Renewal

The current liturgy designed to suit the needs of people in the West does not suit the cultic and spiritual temperament of the Akans. A new liturgy that seriously considers the Akan worship background is needed so that worship service can be meaningful and make the Akan feel at home. This could be done through a serious study of the liturgy of the traditional religion and some of the good elements in it incorporated into Christian worship.

The mechanical repetition of the same prayers every Sunday, as if the needs of the people do not vary, is just not helpful. The church must develop

appropriate liturgy for the traditional rites like marriage, puberty, birth, death, and widowhood which the people occasionally revert to. Theology or Christology must in the final analysis be pursued in the context of worship.

The same can be said of the hymnody of the church. Singing of songs in worship become much more meaningful when people can sing with meaning and understanding. The use of indigenous hymns needs to be encouraged. Music composed in traditional lyrics and tunes certainly strike the right note in the hearts and touch their emotional depths more than foreign hymns and anthems. Producing a relevant hymnody will require a combination of such qualities as a thorough understanding of music, linguistic analysis, cultural sensitivity and theological and biblical knowledge.

Implications for Theology in Africa

Theology done in Africa for several years has been very much influenced by Western thinking. The result has been that it has left unanswered many of the questions that are of utmost concern to Africans. The church was not planted on African soil in a cultural vacuum. It is important that its theology must take the African context into consideration. The clarion call for African theology is therefore a step in the right direction and must be encouraged. The African experience of life must be a valid source for theological reflection. African theologies must not however be an apology for African traditional religion.

Implications for Leadership Training

There is a need for a new, bold, and vigorous program of recruiting and training for ministry. The present theological training which is more foreign in orientation needs to be replaced with one that is more African and contextual to our situation. Thus seminary education needs to be restructured so that it will not only produce graduates but equip leaders to deal with issues that confront in their ministry, particularly those relating to traditional religion and culture.

At present the church is faced with the problem of effective leadership. There is therefore the need to plan, develop, and implement a vigorous program of leadership development. The present situation in which many pastors are not obliged to continue with their theological training once they complete their probation and are ordained must give way to continuing education.¹ There should be a program in place to equip the pastors already in the field to enhance their effectiveness.

Implications for Pastoral Care and Counseling

A pastoral response is also needed to deal with the problem of split-level Christianity. Many Africans facing crises situation need adequate pastoral care and counselling because those are the times they easily revert to traditional beliefs and practices as a way of coping with them. The approach

to counselling here must be cross-cultural taking into consideration the worldview of the people. Masamba ma Mpolo is right in saying that:

In making diagnoses and proposing treatment plans, psychotherapy and pastoral counselling should be cognizant of evil forces as a very potent reality in the patient's perceptual world but also in the therapeutic process that is to be planned for the patient. As a starting point, the therapist must accept as valid the experience for the patient, while attempting to modify, in order to enrich, whenever necessary, the patient's diagnosis and world-view. (1991:27-28)

Implications for Communicating the Gospel

Language is an important element in any culture, and the key in decodifying any culture. The Akans use symbols and symbolic language to express their experiences in life. This symbolic language includes proverbs, myths, and folk stories. In communicating the Christian message adequate use should be made of the proverbs and folklore of the people. Any communicator who makes use of some of these sayings is likely to make an impact on the people.

Implications for Pneumatology

Considering the vastness of the African spirit world the question of the ministry of the Holy Spirit which has been a neglected ministry in the church should be taken seriously. Renewal in the church can never happen without the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit. Evangelism is the Spirit of God in and

through us. God's Spirit is therefore the prime agent of mission in God's people to God's world.

This implies that the role of the Holy Spirit in the church must receive a renewed emphasis. All too often emphasis on the Holy Spirit has been associated with the African Independent Churches popularly called *sunsum sor* or spiritual churches as if the Holy Spirit operates only in those churches. We suggest that since in the African worldview the spiritual world plays an important part, it is absolutely important in Christian ministry to emphasize the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This can compensate for such things as spirit possession which characterizes most African religion.

Implications for Spiritual Renewal

There is no question that there is too much display of outward piety without inward renewal. Split-level Christianity will persist unless hearts are changed and the church becomes a renewed community. Christianity creates new lives, a renewed will, and a higher sense of responsibility to God and humans (2 Corinthians 5:17). This change cannot take place through legalism and church rules but only through the power of God's Spirit. As God's Spirit gains control and power in the hearts and minds of people, what is evil will slough off, as the old leaves are shed from a vigorous tree.

All this means that for all who have been baptized, confirmed, and even ordained, we need to seriously ask ourselves these questions:

Have I been born again?

Have I totally renounced all forms of idol worship?

Have I yielded undivided, unconditional, and thankful obedience to God?

The questions may be offensive to some people; nevertheless, they are key questions and if honestly answered can help in our spiritual renewal and growth towards Christian maturity.

Summary, Conclusions, and Suggestions for Further Research

We realize from this study the challenge of African culture to the church as well as the challenge of the message of the church to African culture since Christian faith makes judgements of all cultures.

We have demonstrated that the problem could be effectively dealt with if the church will come to a form of dialogue with the African culture, in this case the Akan culture, and will adopt a fresh ministry approach to the Akans taking into consideration their cultural background. This implies taking steps to rid the church of all the Western cultural trappings which are not necessarily Christian. The goal is that the Akan become truly Christian and truly Akan.

At this juncture the question may arise, "doesn't the choice of limiting this study to one ethnic group in Africa limit the universal value of such a work?" Even though this research has focused on the Akans, the findings of

this study have missiological implications for churches in other Africa societies where the church exists in a context influenced by African traditional religion. It also has implication for the churches in the West since Christian faith by its very nature is foreign to all cultures. The problem of split-level Christianity is not limited to the Akans; there are parallel cases elsewhere, especially where people resort to other means to meet their needs, particularly, where the church has not been effective in responding to those felt needs. In times of distress, such as sickness, death, and economic depression, the sacred dimension of life is given new impetus. Secularization is not so evident during such times of crises. People naturally find other means to meet their needs.

Again people have thought that traditional or folk religion, which was considered "irrational" would disappear with increasing rationality and the dawn of modern science. But this has not happened. Some of these beliefs and practices considered to be irrational persist even in the most technologically sophisticated industrial societies.

For example, belief in practices concerning the ancestors is alive and well in Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong.

It makes sense to say that traditional or folk religion is ubiquitous today, whether the interest is in New Age mysticism, horoscope occultism, Haitian voodooism, or Chinese ancestor veneration. There appears to be a rediscovery of the spiritual dimension of life in modern secular societies or a

return to pre-Christian faith in magic. In spite of the basic inadequacy of such beliefs, Christian mission needs to come to terms with them if it is to be relevant; hence the universal significance of our study.

Another implication of the study for missiology is that no church exists in a cultural vacuum. This implies that the church must come to grips with cultural factors. In order to make a lasting impact, a new belief system must be in touch with the religious values and presuppositions held by the people. It is difficult to uproot people entirely from their culture.

The problem of spilt-level Christianity is not necessarily an African problem. It exists in a different form in Western societies, where many Christians are influenced by secular ideologies rather than traditional religion as is the case in Africa.² Again, primal religions pervade every nation; for some they are the foundations of life, for others their influence is unrecognized but crucial. It could be said that many church members in the West turn first of all to the horoscope in their morning paper, and others turn to spiritism, witchcraft, and new religious movements. Thus it is not uncommon to find church members resorting to sources outside the church for solutions to their problems. Until the church is able to empower people Christianity will remain superficial among the people or even be perceived as irrelevant.

The purpose of limiting this work to an ethnic group is to provide a model for any similar study in any other place. It is meant to demonstrate that it is important to take seriously the cultural background of a people in any

attempt to present the Christian faith to them. In a broader sense the study has implications for all agents of change. For the successful introduction of any change into a society the cultural factors need to be taken seriously into consideration.

Areas for Further Research

Our aim has been to generate further discussion on this important question of dealing with the problem of split-level Christianity and to suggest how best the Christian message can be related to African culture.

We have not been able to discuss all the issues involved in this very important task. Certain aspects of the study require further study and research.

This dissertation has laid out problems that many of us have struggled with for years, namely split-level Christianity. Other areas that need more study are: (1) Developing guidelines for discussing which areas of Akan traditional religion are redeemable, (2) Christological issues relating to Akan beliefs about the dead and ancestors, (3) Christian approaches to traditional medical practices. (4) Christian attitudes to libation as a form of traditional prayer.

I would like to conclude this study with my own story. In 1977, sensing the call of God for full time ministry in the church, I entered the seminary to be trained as a minister of the gospel. While in seminary I studied Greek, Hebrew, church history, homiletics, pastoral counseling, etc. I was very

confident after my seminary training that I was going to deliver the goods to any congregation where I would be appointed.

During my first pastoral appointment in a church, I was confronted with a situation for which my seminary training had not equipped me. It was during a church service when suddenly one of the worshipers fell to the ground. Her body began to shake, and her eyes became red, and she also became numb.

I was called to the scene. Everyone was hoping I could offer some assistance. I did not know exactly what to do. I thought it was a medical problem so I suggested that the woman be taken to the hospital. But to my surprise one of the church elders told me that this was not a case for the hospital because the woman had been possessed by a spirit.

Unfortunately, my seminary training had not taught me how to recognize or deal with such a situation. I had read about Bultmann who had demythologized such cases of demon possession. But here I was confronted with the reality of such issues. I learnt later that the woman was taken to a traditional priest healer. This is an example of a case where the church has not been able to help their members deal with certain life issues that confront them. It is also a pointer to the fact that Western theology has been largely ignorant of and embarrassingly impotent in the face of human questions in the churches of Africa. Hopefully the insights of this study will help future African pastors and Western missionaries to avoid that.

All too often members of the church have been constantly told to give up their traditional beliefs and practices but find it difficult to do so. This story illustrates that many Akans hold on to some traditional beliefs and practices not because they are unfaithful. While the church has encouraged them to give up those beliefs, the church has not provided them with a substitute and so naturally they cling to them.

End Notes

1. The current practice of the church is that after seminary training pastors serve a period of probation for three years before they are ordained. During that period they are expected to study certain prescribed courses.
2. It is interesting that people refer to the unchurched people in Africa as pagan, and refer to their counterparts or the same people in the West as secular.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Name_____ Age____
2. Church_____ Sex____
3. How long have you been a member of the church?
4. Why and how did you become a member of the church?
5. What position do you hold in the church?
6. Do you belong to any para-church group?

Traditional Beliefs and Practices

7. Should a Christian engage in traditional practices such as pouring of libation?
8. What do you do when someone in your family dies, give birth, marry, or get sick?

Birth

8. Should a Christian perform the traditional naming rites/outdooring?

Marriage

9. Is it important for a Christian to go through the traditional marriage rite?
10. What do you see as right or wrong in the church's attitude towards polygamists?

Death

11. Why is it important to engage in traditional rites concerning the dead?
12. Should a Christian engage in ancestral beliefs and practices?
13. Do the dead have power to cause harm to the living?
14. Should a Christian go through the widowhood rites?

Beliefs in Witchcraft and Spiritual Powers

15. Do beliefs in witchcraft exist and are supernatural powers real? Yes__ No__
16. Can witchcraft, sorcery and other spiritual forces be responsible for diseases and other problems? Yes__ No__
17. Should one seek protection from supernatural powers? Yes__ No__

Crises Experience

18. Do you consider traditional medical practices valid?
19. Do you believe traditional religious specialists are effective in helping people with spiritual problems?
20. Do you believe certain human problems have some spiritual dimension?
Yes__ No__
21. Do you find the church effective in dealing with people's spiritual needs?
22. Should a Christian undergo traditional medical treatment?
23. Do you know of other church members who visit traditional religious specialists?

African Independent Churches

23. What do you consider as some of the reasons why people are attracted to the African Independent Churches?

INTERVIEW WITH PASTORS

1. Do you consider belief in witchcraft and evil spirits to be real?
2. Do you know of instances where church members resort to traditional beliefs and practices?
3. How can the church deal effectively with this problem of split-level Christianity?
4. Does your church have any program of evangelism?
5. Do you conduct healing services in your church?

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